

**THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL
AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF FIRST-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS:
EL TABERNÁCULO EVANGELICO, A CASE STUDY**

**A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**BY
DAVID MARTINEZ**

MAY, 2007

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND DIAGRAMS	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii

PART I: CLARIFICATION

Introduction	1
 CHAPTER ONE: The Problem and Its Setting: The Context of the Tabernáculo Evangelico	 4
The Hispanic Church: A “Mestizaje” of Traditions	5
Immigrants in the United States	8
Hispanic People in the United States	8
Hispanic People in Southern New England	11
Profile of the Tabernáculo Evangelico	12
The Tabernáculo Evangelico: An Urban Church?	28
Preliminary Conclusions	29

PART II: CONCEPTUALIZATION

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review	31
 CHAPTER THREE: Toward a Theology of Urban Ministry for the Immigrant Church in the Context of Education	 61
Introduction	61
Toward a Theology of Education for the Immigrant Church	62
Lessons Learned	79
Conclusion	83

CHAPTER FOUR: Project Design	85
Introduction	85
The Body of Christ and the Fifth Discipline	86
Education in the Immigrant Church	87
Initial Analysis	89
Pastoral Interviews	99
Reflection on the Hexagon Process	102

PART III: CONFRONTATION

CHAPTER FIVE: Outcomes and Conclusion	105
Reaching Out	105
Why Education?	108
Education and Religion	109
Education and Social Justice	110
Education: A Hard Sell	111
Education: A Tool for Cultural Embrace	114
A Strategy for Christian Education	117
Implications of Findings	118
Suggestions for Further Research	120
Executive Summary of the Thesis Project	121
Goals and Objectives for the Tabernáculo	125
Recommended Guidelines for Pastors	126

APPENDICES

1. Population Data	128
2. History of the Tabernáculo Evangelico	132
3. Educational Programs	135
4. Transcript of Pastoral Interviews	140

BIBLIOGRAPHY	151
---------------------	------------

VITA	155
-------------	------------

TABLES AND DIAGRAMS

TABLES

1.	Population [National vs. Hispanic]	9
2.	Increase in Population [National vs. Hispanic]	9
3.	Distribution of Workers in the Labor Force [Native vs. Foreign-Born]	10
4.	Population of Southern New England, 1990-2000 [Total vs. Hispanic]	11
5.	Nationality of Church Membership vs. Local Hispanic Community	15
6.	Tabulation of Responses to Hexagon Process Questionnaire	90
7.	Hexagon Clusters	93
8.	Negative Factors Affecting Implementation of Educational Programs	96
9.	Two Church Models: Traditional and Non-Traditional Type	106

DIAGRAMS

1.	Organization Chart — Tabernáculo Evangelico	16
2.	A Typical Cell Group	25
3.	Cell Group Distribution	26
4.	Hexagon Process Questionnaire	88
5.	Causal Loop Diagram	98

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to dedicate this project to my wife, Rosa, who shouldered numerous ministerial duties at the Tabernáculo Evangelico, as I strove to meet my academic commitments. Her extraordinary flexibility and patience kept our family going through many late-night study sessions and bouts with writer's block.

I thank my daughters Rosie, Ann Marie, and Georgina, and my sons-in-law Guillermo and Geovany, for their spirited contributions to our ministry to the younger generation at the Tabernáculo.

I would like to thank my congregation, the Tabernáculo Evangelico, for their moral and financial support during my extended student career at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

I wish to express my thanks to the following people for providing information, advice and assistance:

Revs. Rafael Reyes, Rev. Domingo Valdez, Dr. Nicanor Gonzalez and Rev. Cesar Rodriguez of the Spanish Eastern District Council of The Assemblies of God.

Revs. Nelson Gonzalez, Luis Rivera and Cecilio Hernandez for the insights they offered during interviews in connection with this project.

The staff of the Bruce W. Jackson Library, CUME, for their responsiveness to my many requests for source materials.

Dr. Alvin Padilla, who convinced me that I wasn't too old to pursue a degree program at CUME.

Dr. Douglas Hall and Judy, whose passion for teaching showed me what St. Paul meant when he referred to pastors as teachers.

Dr. Eldin Villafañe, whom I first met some thirty years ago, and who is my Rev. Ricardo Tañon.

Dr. Sherlane Washington, for giving me an appreciation for the value of mentoring in urban ministry.

Robert Duchacek for editorial support.

As I look back, I realize that all of my efforts began with a commitment to Jesus. It is no exaggeration to say that I owe all I have to him, as well as my prospects for the future. With a faith that enabled him to face death on the cross, how much can I hope to achieve by striving to emulate his example? Move mountains?

ABSTRACT

The Hispanic population, comprising people with ethnic roots in Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, is growing rapidly in southern New England. The influx of new immigrants presents fresh challenges to Hispanic evangelical churches in suburban Boston. This project focuses on the role of education as a tool for addressing the social and spiritual needs of these first-generation immigrants. The implications for the growth of the local church are considered, together with the theological significance of education in furthering the mission of the church itself.

Hispanic evangelical churches, especially those made up of recent immigrants, are experiencing a major change from their traditionally religious role in Latino society. In addition to serving their spiritual needs, the churches find themselves dealing with a wide array of social, economic and educational factors, faced by their parishioners. On the one hand, Christian ethics require the church to take action on behalf of the Hispanic community. On the other, the sheer size and scope of the problem is enough to discourage serious effort.

This project attempts to clarify the educational vision for churches, especially those characterized as ‘immigrant’ congregations. The practical aspects of education in such churches, with emphasis on the Tabernáculo Evangelico in Revere, MA, are discussed. Methodologies for implementing educational programs, with examples of curricula, are included.

PART I: CLARIFICATION

Introduction

Hispanic Pentecostal churches in the Boston area are undergoing rapid and active change. Subject to a diverse array of social, cultural and religious influences, local Hispanic churches are evolving in many different ways.

When I began my first pastorate in southern Connecticut, my flock consisted entirely of people of Puerto Rican descent. Over the years, however, my ministry has become oriented to a new generation of immigrants from Central America, principally El Salvador and Guatemala. How did this come about?

Fleeing civil conflict and social turmoil in their home countries, thousands of Central Americans have crossed our frontiers to seek refuge in this country. The difference in economic opportunities has provided a further impetus to this massive exodus northward.

Having arrived here, do these immigrants find themselves in the promised land? Have they fulfilled their dreams? Or have they merely added to their problems? To answer these questions, it is necessary to visualize the challenges facing Hispanic immigrants.

The Hispanic Struggle

Over a period of twenty-five years as a pastor serving Hispanic Pentecostal churches, I have seen the struggle of my parishioners against difficult conditions, on several levels. On the economic level, it is common knowledge that Hispanic immigrants live on the edge of subsistence. For recent arrivals, especially those who are undocumented, the battle for survival takes place in the shadows. Often working for cash in the underground economy, they receive few if any company benefits, and enjoy little job security. To

economize, Hispanic people often share apartments, and take care of one another's children, so that both husband and wife can work.

On the political level, Hispanics are also at a significant disadvantage. Because of the language barrier, and also because of their generally low educational level, they are unable to communicate their problems and needs effectively. Preoccupied with economic survival, they fail to recognize the power of their numbers, or the value of organizing politically. As a result, their political voice is often muted or silent. In southern New England, the largest group of Hispanics comes from Puerto Rico. As legal citizens, Puerto Ricans constitute the most powerful Hispanic voting bloc in this area. Other groups have far less potential influence, and illegal immigrants have no voting rights.

On the social level, Hispanics face an array of barriers. Their lack of proficiency in English, as well as their speaking accent, creates the impression that they are mentally slow. Added to this are physical characteristics of skin tone and hair that set them apart from the main population. Prejudices about Hispanics include the beliefs that they are inclined to be dirty, likely to be involved in crime, and live on welfare. While it is not my purpose here to disprove prejudices about Hispanics, I would like to respond by saying that, in my experience of visiting many parishioners at home, I have found very few dirty apartments. Furthermore, I can say with confidence that, especially in the case of undocumented immigrants, the incentive to become involved in any way with legal authorities is very weak. With the possibility of deportation looming over their heads, compounded by the difficulty of communication, recent Hispanic immigrants prefer to avoid the scrutiny of police or government agencies.

In my church ministry, I have preached about these problems on a regular basis. More recently, I have tried to connect my ministry more closely to the needs of my church

members. I have come to the conclusion that the church must help parishioners as they face the economic, political and social obstacles described above. This, it seems to me, is an essential part of the pastor's role in fostering church growth. In this project I will discuss ways in which the church can address the practical needs of its membership.

Education: A Critical Need

One of the greatest needs of my congregation, the Tabernáculo Evangelico, is for education. In subsequent chapters, I will describe our efforts to help our members to acquire basic literacy skills, both in Spanish and English. One of our programs, for example, involves tutoring of immigrant students, usually of high school age, by adult volunteers from the congregation. Often we found that failing students could do the work, once they understood the assignment.

In addition to basic competencies, however, education has implications for immigrant Hispanics that extend beyond economic advancement or success in adjusting to American culture. From the pulpit, I urge my flock to recognize that education provides an avenue to political power. I tell them that education develops the ability to think critically about questions of social justice, enabling us to make intelligent choices regarding political issues affecting Hispanics in particular.

What is the connection between the mission of the church and the aims of education? An obvious nexus arises from the fact that literacy is required to read the Bible. Of more far-reaching significance, however, is the fact that education lights the path to social justice. Why? Because education permits access to the social power structure. Without competence and literacy in English, I tell my Hispanic parishioners, they will remain disadvantaged. But education, when used rightly, serves to promote social justice, the fruits of which can be expressed as *shalom*.

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem and Its Setting: The Context of the Tabernáculo Evangelico

Hispanic evangelical churches, especially those made up of recent immigrants, are experiencing a major change from their traditional religious role in Latino society. In addition to serving their spiritual needs, the churches find themselves dealing with a wide array of social, economic and educational factors, faced by their parishioners. On the one hand, Christian ethics require the church to take action on behalf of the Hispanic community. On the other, the sheer size and scope of the problem is enough to discourage serious effort.

An Unexpected Challenge

When I began my pastoral career 25 years ago, I saw my role as simple and one-dimensional: it was to win souls for Christ. I felt I had to do everything in my power, with the help of God, to make the church grow. However, when I came to Boston in 1991, my pastoral role took a turn in another direction.

Soon after I first arrived, I discovered that the educational level of my mostly immigrant congregation was about that of the fifth grade. Many of my parishioners were unable to fill out a job application, even if it was in Spanish. I quickly became involved in assisting church members with visa applications, helping them complete forms in connection with work and residency permits, and coordinating with attorneys and paralegals handling the cases of people with proceedings before the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

All of these activities of course required competency in reading, writing and speaking English. In the case of my flock, deficiencies in basic literacy were complicated by the language barrier. Clearly we were faced with a challenge. As their pastor, the question for me became, Should the church involve itself in meeting the educational needs of its members? The answer to this question provides the rationale for this project.

Overview

In this chapter, I will attempt to identify some of the demographic factors affecting Hispanic immigrant churches, drawing upon published resources as well as my own experience in ministry. Thinking systemically, I see the need to acquire an understanding of the social context in which contemporary Hispanic churches find themselves. For this purpose, I will examine some of the historical and cultural factors that shape attitudes toward the role of education in Hispanic churches. I will include in my analysis recent census figures of the Hispanic population, starting from a national perspective and moving progressively to the local level.

Next, in order to document the system under consideration, I shall present a comprehensive profile of my church, the Tabernáculo Evangelico in Revere, MA. The physical site, social setting, and ethnicity of the membership will be described, as well as the organization and traditional practices of the church itself.

The Hispanic Church: A “Mestizaje” of Traditions

Historical Background

The Hispanic church in New England is at the center of swirling cross-currents. Up until about 1980, the Hispanic population of southern New England was largely of

Mexican and Puerto Rican extraction. Since then, a new movement of Hispanic immigrants, primarily from Central and South America, has continued to this day. People escaping from unrest in El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, and from the Pinochet regime in Chile, have sought refuge in the United States.

Even within the United States itself, many Hispanics are leaving the states of California, Florida and Texas, which have been enforcing rules aimed at unregistered aliens. Many times these people arrive in New England with little in the way of material resources, or even education. Frequently they come to the church first, before any other institution, for help. Generally, they feel more comfortable in approaching a pastor with questions that they could not raise anywhere else. Why? At least partly because the pastor's role as advisor, counselor and teacher goes back to their cultural roots in the Catholic church.

CATHOLIC ROOTS. In the overwhelming majority of cases, Hispanic people are either Catholic or formerly Catholic. Even Pentecostal Hispanics are previously Catholic, for the most part, except in the case of young children or Hispanic people who were born in this country. As a result, the Catholic influence remains strong, producing a degree of conservatism that extends to Protestant and secular Hispanics as well. In the case of recent immigrants, this conservatism is even stronger.

For Hispanic people, the figure of the Catholic priest as moral preceptor is imprinted from earliest childhood. Invested with divine authority, the priest is reinforced by the full weight of Catholic tradition. In such a context, the clergy becomes identified with fundamental spiritual values, and acquires implicit power as an interpreter of religious doctrine.

THE EVANGELICAL REACTION. Although Latin America is traditionally Catholic, millions of Hispanics have changed their religious affiliation in recent decades. It is no exaggeration to say that the Protestant evangelical movement in Latin America has been something like an explosion. Surprisingly, however, the trend toward Protestant evangelism in Hispanic countries goes back more than a century. During its early stages, the movement was heavily influenced by the United States. For example, my own denomination, the Assemblies of God, was founded in Kansas.

The American acquisition of Puerto Rico in 1898, following the Spanish-American War, opened the door to missionary involvement in Latin America by Protestant churches from the States. Military activities and economic development by the U.S. in Central and South America, during the first few decades of the 20th century, led to outreach campaigns by Presbyterians, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Assemblies of God, to mention a few.

Eldin Villafañe has described at length the development of Hispanic Pentecostal churches in the northeastern U.S.¹ He demonstrates that, until quite recently, the proliferation of Hispanic churches came about chiefly through immigration from Puerto Rico and Mexico. Since 1990, however, immigrant churches in particular owe much of their growth to immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia and the Dominican Republic. These new arrivals bring with them attitudes about education that may profoundly affect the course of ministry. Some feel that secular education has no place in church. I find that such attitudes are often shaped by theology as well as cultural considerations. These issues will therefore be taken up in Chapter 4, where theological arguments relating to an educational role for the church are discussed.

¹ Eldin Villafañe, *El Espíritu Libertador: Hacia una ética social pentecostal hispanoamericana*, Chap. 2, "La dimensión religiosa hispanoamericana," 45-116.

Immigrants in the United States

The Growing Population of the Foreign Born

The rising tide of immigration, much of it from Latin America, is rapidly changing the demographic makeup of the United States. According to an estimate released by the U.S. Census Bureau in August, 2006, the number of immigrants increased 16 percent between 2000 and 2005, to 35.7 million,² according to the same study. Of these, nearly 17 million are of Hispanic descent. At the same time, some 10.5 million, or 29.4%, were undocumented, as reported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.³ From these figures, it seems reasonable to conclude that a substantial proportion of the immigrant population arrived from Latin America without documentation. This surely comes as no surprise, but it presents implications for Hispanic churches that will be considered later.

Hispanic People in the United States

The Growing Hispanic Population

For many decades, the United States has hosted immigrants from Latin America. Ever since the acquisition of Puerto Rico as an American territory in 1898, Puerto Rican people have been coming to work in the U.S. I myself emigrated to the States 30 years ago, at the age of 25.

A look at the most recent federal census figures for 1990 vs. 2000 shows that the Hispanic cohort has grown significantly. As a percentage of the overall population, Hispanics are claiming a progressively larger share, as revealed by the following table:

²ABS—CBN Interactive, “U.S. immigrant population jumps,” *Reuters* (Aug. 21, 2006), <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/storypage.aspx?StoryId=47522>.

³Suzanne Gamboa, “Feds estimate 10.5M illegal immigrants,” *Boston Globe* (Aug. 18, 2006), http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2006/08/18/feds_estimate_105m_illegal_immigrants/.

Population [National vs. Hispanic]⁴

U.S.	Total Population (Millions)*	Hispanic Population (Millions)*	Percent of Total (Hispanic)
1990 Census	248.7	22.4	9.0 %
2000 Census	281.4	35.3	12.5%

*As of April 1 in the decennial year.

As reported by the ECS [Education Commission of the States] Policy Issues website, Hispanics are currently the largest minority group, with 35.3 million; the second largest group is African American, with 33.5 million.⁵

A comparison of the overall population with the Hispanic cohort shows a dramatic difference in the rate of growth, both current and projected:

Increase in Population [National vs. Hispanic]⁶

Period of Increase	National Population (Millions)*	Hispanic Population (Millions)*	National Population Growth (%)	Hispanic Population Growth (%)
(1990–2000)	282.1	35.6	13.1	57.6
(2000-2030)	363.6	73.0	28.9	105.1
(2000-2050)	419.9	102.6	48.8	188.2

*As of July 1.

By the year 2030, the number of Hispanics is projected to more than double from the 2000 level. By 2050, Hispanics will comprise 24.4% of the total population.

⁴U.S. Census Bureau official results. Source: American FactFinder, http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en.

⁵ECS Education Policy Issues Site: Minority/Diversity Issues—Hispanic; Minority/Diversity Issues—African American: <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=84&subIssueID=156>; <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=84&subIssueID=157>.

⁶U.S. Census Bureau, 2004. “U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin,” <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/> Internet Release Date: March 18, 2004.

Where Do They Come From?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Mexico accounts for some 10 million of the foreign-born population, more than any other country in the world. No other Latin American country is remotely comparable in this respect. Other countries [excluding Puerto Rico] that contribute significant numbers of Hispanics are El Salvador (937,000), Cuba (925,000), the Dominican Republic (688,000), Guatemala (590,000) and Colombia (500,000).⁷

Level of Education, Occupation, and Income

EDUCATION. – In 2004, the proportion of the adult population (25 years and older) who had a high school education was 50 percent among all foreign-born from Latin America. The rate for native-born Americans was 88 percent.

OCCUPATION. – In the labor force, nearly three quarters of workers from Latin America were employed in trade and service positions. This was nearly twice the rate for native-born Americans, as shown in the following table.

Distribution of Workers in the Labor Force [Native vs. Foreign-Born]

Occupational Category (Percent of Labor Force)	Foreign-Born Latin Americans ⁸	Native American-Born ⁹
Managers and professionals	12%	37%
Technicians, sales, and Administrative support	16%	27%
Service and skilled workers, farm and manual laborers	72%	36%

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006. Source: American FactFinder press release (July 26, 2006), http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/007173.html

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2004. "Occupation of Employed Foreign-Born Civilian Workers 16 Years and Over from Latin America," <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab04-8.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2004. "Occupation of Employed Foreign-Born Civilian Workers 16 Years and Over by Citizenship Status," <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab01-8.pdf>.

INCOME. – The 2003 median earnings of full-time workers born in Latin America were \$23,615 for men and \$20,575 for women.¹⁰ By contrast, median earnings for native-born workers were \$41,813 for men and \$31,247 for women.¹¹

Hispanic People in Southern New England

Of the three southern New England states (Mass., Conn., R.I.), the state with the largest Hispanic population in 2000 was Massachusetts, with 429,000. This figure, however, fails to reveal the extraordinary rate of increase in the number of Hispanics in the region, between 1990 and 2000. The following table tells the story:

Population of Southern New England, 1990–2000 [Total vs. Hispanic]¹²

	Decennial Census Year	Total Population (Millions)	Rate of Increase (%)	Hispanic Population (Millions)	Rate of Increase (%)
Mass.	1990	6.02	5.48	0.288	49
	2000	6.35		0.429	
Conn.	1990	3.29	3.65	0.213	50
	2000	3.41		0.320	
R.I.	1990	1.003	4.49	0.046	113
	2000	1.048		0.098	

¹⁰U.S. Census Bureau, 2003. “Total Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers 15 Years and Older with Earnings by Sex and World Region of Birth,” <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab03-10.pdf>. Internet Release Date: February 22, 2005.

¹¹U.S. Census Bureau, 2003. “Total Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers 15 Years and Older with Earnings by Sex and Citizenship Status,” <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab01-10.pdf>. Internet Release Date: February 22, 2005.

¹²Sources: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, *1990 Census Profile: Race and Hispanic Origin* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, Number 2 – June 1991), pp. 4-5; U.S. Census Bureau: American FactFinder, Census 2000 Summary File (SF 1) 100-Percent Data, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_lang=en.

Is the same rate of increase continuing into the current decade? Yes, and it appears to be accelerating. Recent figures from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that immigration to Massachusetts from Latin America rose 40.7% between 2000 and 2005.¹³ Where are the new arrivals coming from? During the decade of the 1990s, the number of immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Colombia in Massachusetts increased by 85%.¹⁴ More recently, the population of Central Americans rose by 67.7% between 2000 and 2005, according to the Census Bureau survey cited above.

What are the implications of these data for Hispanic churches, especially those with a large proportion of recent immigrants? Before attempting to address this question, I will present a profile of my own church, the Tabernáculo Evangelico. A brief history of the Tabernáculo appears in Appendix 2 [p. 132].

Profile of the Tabernáculo Evangelico

Physical Site and Surrounding Neighborhood

The Tabernáculo Evangelico [Tabernacle Gospel] church, Assemblies of God [A/G] is located at 957 Broadway, Revere, MA, a few hundred feet from the Revere/Saugus town line. The building was formerly a Chinese restaurant containing 12,400 square feet of floor space. It sits on three quarters of an acre that includes a fenced parking lot with space marked for 42 cars. After extensive renovations we have a sanctuary with space for 475 worshippers. By installing a closed-circuit television in a former upstairs dining area, we increased our seating capacity to 750 people for special events, such as large weddings and conferences.

¹³ Michael Levenson and Yuxing Zheng, "Immigrant numbers up 15% in state since 2000," *Boston Globe* (Aug. 15, 2006), http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2006/08/16/immigrant_numbers_up_15%_in_state_since_2000/.

¹⁴ University of Massachusetts Boston, The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, 2003. *Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans and Colombians: a Scan of Needs of Recent Latin American Immigrants to the Boston Area*, Summary of Findings.

Meanwhile, our regular membership continues to grow. We are now considering the possibility of raising the roof and lowering the floor of the sanctuary in order to create an auditorium for 1500.

The building is situated at a busy traffic rotary formed by the intersection of two commercial arteries on the periphery of a residential neighborhood with a mixture of both middle-class and low-income families. Approximately 20 families in our congregation live within walking distance of the church.

The Local Hispanic Community

Although some of our church members attend services from as far away as New Hampshire and Rhode Island, the overwhelming majority come from ten communities north of Boston, in addition to the city itself. They include Saugus, Lynn, Salem, Malden, Everett, Chelsea, Revere, Winthrop, Somerville and Cambridge.

By any standard, our church could be characterized as an “immigrant” church. Nearly 90% of our members were born outside the U.S. They include 62.1% from Central America, 22.4% from South America [primarily Colombia], 3.0% from the Caribbean, and 2.2% from Mexico. This breakdown, when compared with the national origin of Hispanics in our service area, reveals some striking discrepancies. The table on page 15 compares the figures for our church with the proportion of foreign-born Hispanics in the ten communities listed above.

Geographic Breakdown of the Congregation

A breakdown of the Tabernáculo membership by national origin is shown in the table on page 129 [Appendix 1]. By comparing the nationalities of my church membership

with the local census data, it becomes clear that we are attracting some parts of the local Hispanic community, but not others.¹⁵ For example, Hispanic people from Central America are represented in our congregation to a degree far out of proportion to their presence in the broader community, while their counterparts from the Caribbean and Mexico are under-represented. The table on page 15 indicates where our strengths and deficiencies lie in this area.

As for the host society around us, we have no regular North American members, except for children or spouses of immigrants born in this country. This apparent cultural isolation, in my view, opposes one of the fundamental ideas of Christianity, which teaches the unity of humankind before God, regardless of cultural and linguistic barriers. Some of the reasons for our present situation will be considered later in this paper.

Organization and Governance

The church is governed by a constitution and bylaws that were developed by the congregation after a prototype supplied by the Eastern Spanish District, A/G, together with models supplied by other Pentecostal churches. An organization chart of the Tabernáculo Evangelico appears on page 16.

FINANCE. The constitution of the church requires tithing as a Christian duty, but this rule is not enforced in practice. Contributions are hampered by the fact that many members send money to churches back in their home countries. However, when there is a particularly pressing need, church members make special donations, which include not

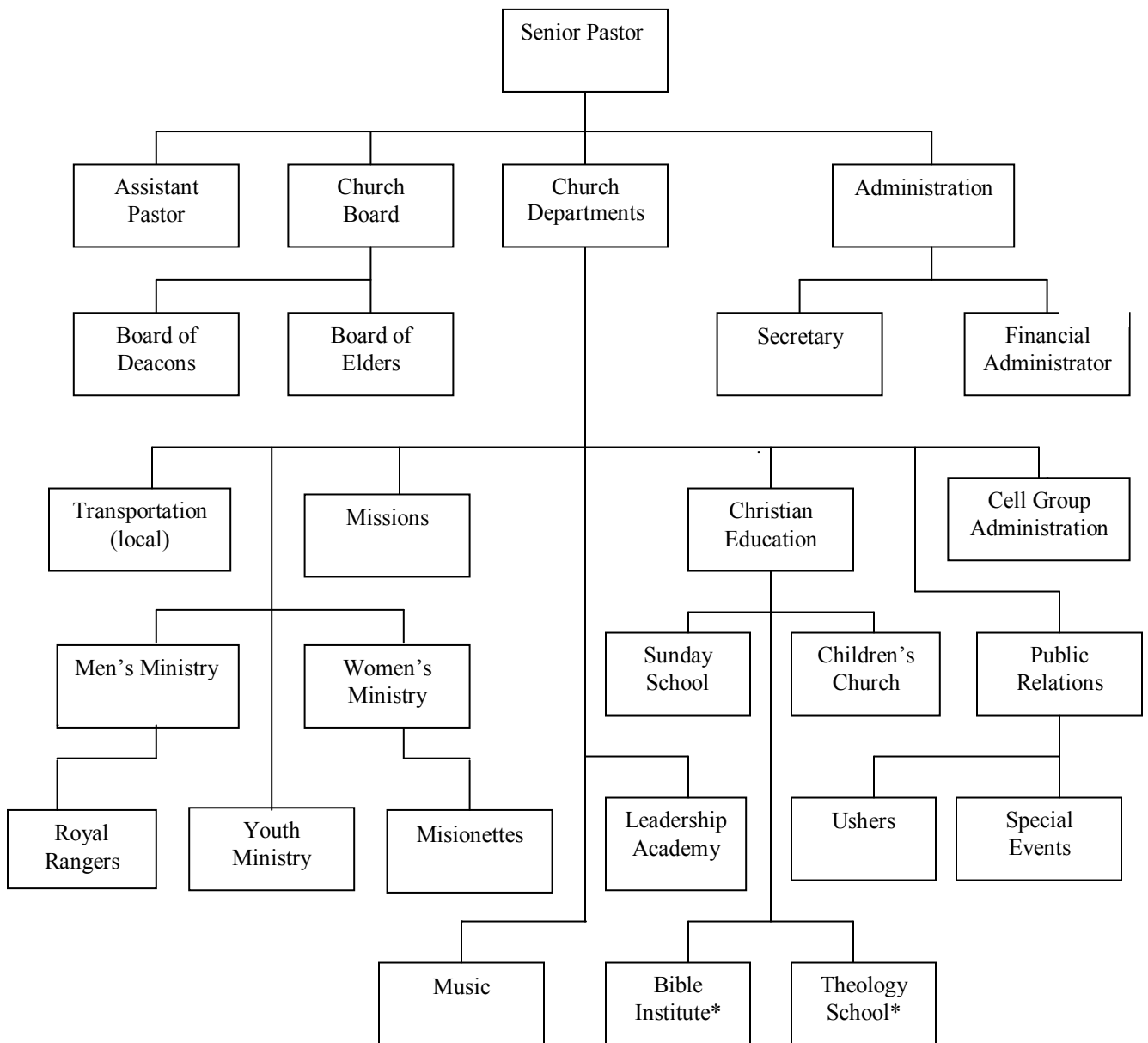
¹⁵The federal census for 2000 provided figures as to the national origin of Hispanics in Boston and the North Shore. The census asked Hispanic people to identify themselves as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban or Other Hispanic. This last category contained space for correspondents to specify national origin, such as Salvadoran or Dominican. Many of those who classified themselves as 'Other Hispanics' did not indicate their native countries. A tabulation of Hispanics living in the ten communities listed on page 15, and their nationality, is shown in Appendix 1 on page 130. A breakdown of these figures in percentage terms appears on page 131.

Nationality of Church Membership vs. Local Hispanic Community

NATIONAL ORIGIN	PERCENT OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	PERCENT OF NEARBY HISPANIC COMMUNITY [*]
Central America	—	—
El Salvador	28.3	16.6
Guatemala	23.9	7.6
Honduras	7.1	4.1
Nicaragua	2.1	0.05
Others	0.9	2.5
Subtotal	62.3	31.0
Caribbean	—	—
Puerto Rico	2.2	27.4
Dominican Republic	0.5	17.4
Others	0.3	2.0
Subtotal	3.0	46.8
South America	—	—
Colombia	15.0	8.4
Peru	2.8	1.8
Others	4.6	3.2
Subtotal	22.4	13.3
Mexico	2.2	8.9

^{*}Based on federal census data for the year 2000.

Organization Chart —Tabernáculo Evangelico



*Conducted under supervision of the Director of Education for the Spanish Eastern District, A/G.

only cash, but also donations in kind. For example, one church member who is in the carpeting business, installed carpets in our new sanctuary and church offices, before the church opened.

MEMBERSHIP. Although anyone is free to attend services, those desiring to join the church must bring a letter from their former pastor, describing their role in the previous congregation. For those with no credentials, a three-month probationary period is required. Members must fill out an application and be formally presented to the congregation.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS. Once a year, a business meeting is held to elect church officers and vote on issues affecting the membership. Members age 16 and above are eligible to vote.

Church Traditions

THEOLOGY. The church's theology is mainly Arminian, although some members come from a Baptist background that leans somewhat toward Calvinism. Our religious doctrine is of course derived from the Assemblies of God (a classical Pentecostal denomination), which reflects the outlook of white American theologians. Some Latino theologians have begun producing works that emanate from a Latino perspective, but so far this has not influenced the didactic materials that we use to instruct our young people.

LITURGY. The style of worship at the Tabernáculo Evangelico is flexible, with regard to vocal expressions of praise. Those who come from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, where religious practices are influenced by African traditions, may tend to be especially demonstrative and energetic. Others, such as those from Central America, may be more on the quiet side. In either case, the church tries to maintain a balance that

respects individual preferences and cultural norms.

BAPTISM. Baptism, in accordance with our theology, is by total immersion. In the past, we held a special service at a lake or pond, in summer, to accommodate those who had never been baptized. When we remodeled the new facility in 2003, we installed a 940-gallon immersion tank, which we use 3 or 4 times a year to baptize 15–20 people at a time. Anyone age 12 or above can be baptized; children ages 10 to 12 can be baptized at the discretion of the pastor and church officials. We do not subscribe to infant baptism, as being biblically unjustified. However, we perform a ceremony of dedication for infants up to 10 years of age, when requested by the parents.

EUCCHARIST. The sacrament of Holy Communion is generally administered the first Sunday of the month, to all church members. This includes children as young as 10 who have met the requirements for church membership.

ACTIVITIES. Among our seasonal events are special services on New Year's Eve and Thanksgiving [*Acción de Gracias*], in spite of the fact that Thanksgiving is not a Hispanic holiday. On Pastor's Day, in October, the church makes a special gift to the pastor and his family. We observe Christmas, of course, but this holiday is a source of disagreement within the congregation. The Hispanic tradition of *Navidad* does not involve Santa Claus or Christmas trees, although it includes gift-giving. As a result, there is some divergence in the way Christmas is observed in different families.

Our youth activities, in addition to Sunday school, include Royal Rangers, a form of Christian Boy Scouts, and Missionettes, a similar activity for girls. Also for girls who turn 15, we have a *quinciñera*, a kind of dedicatory service, followed by a “coming-out” party for the celebrant. We occasionally mark birthdays; this includes the “birthday” of

the church itself, which is a special fund-raising event.

During the year, we normally hold several revival [*avivamiento*] campaigns at which other pastors and evangelists are invited to speak. Such revivals may encompass three services extending from Friday night through Sunday. We also hold conferences focusing on themes such as marriage or youth-related problems. Annually we send a contingent to a meeting of the New England section within the Eastern Spanish District, A/G, and occasionally we host the event.

DOXOLOGY. Our musical tradition could best be described as *alabanza y adoración* [praise and worship], a style of musical expression widely practiced in Pentecostal churches. We sing the standard “Hymnos de Gloria” [hymns of glory] that go back 100 years or more. Moreover, we try to be as inclusive as possible in our music as well as our liturgy. We will sing any song suggested by newcomers, although we usually examine its theology first. Our music includes guitars, tambourines, drums, maracas, electronic keyboards, and occasionally trumpets. The music director is in charge of two groups that sing and take turns at the instruments. At special events we may have professional singers and choral performances by visiting church groups; otherwise, different members of the congregation lead the singing. The predominant style is romantic, which is somewhat slow and impassioned. However, we frequently include songs with strong rhythms sung at a rapid tempo.

KERYGMA. Various translated as preaching or evangelizing, is one of our foremost purposes as a church. Although there are strong exhortations about *kerygma* in the Bible, a more subtle mandate was delivered by Jesus himself: “He who has ears, let him hear” [Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8]. In this spirit, we advertise our church on the local Spanish radio,

particularly to let new arrivals in the area know who and where we are.

We also make an effort to bring the Gospel to people in their homes. Small groups of church members visit individuals and families, by referral, to explain our religious traditions. We are not necessarily recruiting members for the Tabernáculo Evangelico, however. If a prospect tells me, for example, that our church is not conveniently located, I can and do refer him or her to another Pentecostal church nearby.

DIDACHE. Programs that involve teaching or instruction [*didache*] have particular significance for us at the Tabernáculo Evangelico. Over the past 14 years, we have pursued a two-part program of both religious and secular education. On the religious side, we maintain traditional Sunday school curricula for children, complemented by Bible study for adults. Because of their social and cultural circumstances, however, the needs of our parishioners for secular education are especially acute. Our response to this need is described later in this chapter.

Missions Programs

When I arrived in 1991, the Mount Carmel church (the predecessor of the Tabernáculo Evangelico) had no missions effort under way. For me, back then, the church itself became a personal mission, because here was a congregation with special needs. About 90 percent of the church members at the time were undocumented immigrants from Latin America who had entered the U.S. illegally. Most came from El Salvador, but several other countries were represented.

Some of our members — especially the most recent arrivals in the Boston area — were in marginal or even desperate circumstances. I personally recall cases where people showed up at the church with no money or place to stay. Sometimes members of the

congregation, or their friends, would take them in temporarily, until they could find an apartment to rent or share with others. Other times, church members would contribute clothing or kitchen utensils for destitute families. Occasionally, we would tap into church funds to help people in an emergency.

As discussed earlier, Hispanic immigrants, in particular those without documents, face an array of social and economic obstacles. Under these circumstances, I found myself providing my parishioners with job counseling, help with job placement, and aid in finding apartments. I also worked with those who were applying for visas, helping them to complete forms in connection with work and residency permits, or explaining immigration procedures and requirements.

Upon arrival, I became aware of the acute need of our church members for gainful employment. Almost immediately I began contacting prospective employers about positions available for members. In 1995, we organized a committee to establish an information network that we now call a “job bank.”

Such activities may give the impression of a church serving as a social service agency disguised in clerical garb. Theologically, however, I find biblical underpinnings for our various programs, which I will discuss in Chapter 3.

Notwithstanding our scant resources, I knew from the outset that we needed to mount a viable missions outreach effort of our own. In 1992 we formed a committee to work with the missions program sponsored by the Assemblies of God [A/G]. We began with a modest contribution to the Eastern Spanish district, of which we are a part. About five years ago we began providing support to a mission in Morocco, sponsored by the A/G, and founded to care for and educate destitute orphans. We also help a married couple from the States who are missionaries in the village of De La Cruz, Ecuador.

At the same time, we began assisting churches in El Salvador to which our own members formerly belonged. We helped fund construction projects and sent clothing on flights with members visiting their families back home.

Locally, we started serving breakfast to the homeless in East Boston on Thanksgiving Day, a program that we have continued over the years. In 2004, we served some 250 meals from our facility in Revere. As a youth project, we help an agency in Dorchester named *Yo Me Levantaré* [I Will Rise Up], and another called “Teen Challenge.” Our young people go over to Dorchester to serve meals and participate in religious programs.

In 1995, quite by chance, we helped to plant a church in Montreal, Quebec. One of my parishioners had a relative whose pastor asked that I come to Canada and speak to his congregation of just 5 to 10 people. I went for a visit, and impressed by their sincerity, I decided to ask the deacons at Monte Carmelo to approve support for this group. We offered \$400 a month to enable this congregation to rent a local church hall and provide a modest stipend for the pastor. Several months later I contacted the *presbítero* [supervisor] for the Spanish district in Montreal and asked him to take on this congregation as a mission project. Eventually, some 21 churches grew out of this effort.

In 1998, another opportunity to help a struggling congregation came our way, likewise by chance [or by Sovereign design?]. I was standing in a queue at the post office and struck up a conversation with a man who happened to be the pastor of an independent Haitian Pentecostal group that met in a storefront in Malden. Recently, he said, the building had been closed by the city for zoning violations. I invited this pastor to my church the same day to meet our board of deacons, and work out some sort of arrangement to use our facility. The next day, Sunday, this 14-member congregation held services in our church. We charged them no rent for the first year, during which the group

affiliated itself with the Assemblies of God. At the same time, I worked with the pastor to establish the second Haitian church in the New England Section, this one in a suburb of Providence, RI.

I tell the story of these church-planting projects not simply to tout our programs, but to highlight the element of chance that appears to play a role in the turn of events. I plan to reflect further on this in Chapter 5.

Since 1998, our missions program has expanded significantly. In March, 2001 I traveled with three church members to El Salvador. The purpose of our trip was two-fold. First, we wanted to understand the nature of the suffering that we had been hearing about, particularly in the aftermath of recent earthquakes and of Hurricane Mitch. Second, we wanted to deliver what help we could to the people and churches we were to visit there.

To make a long story short, after we returned home we decided to support the planting of new churches in Central America, either by paying the rent or funding construction as necessary, and providing a salary to the pastor. In 2004 we sponsored the opening of a third church in El Salvador; we support two others in Guatemala. From the latter country, moreover, we have received a benefit of major significance to the Tabernáculo Evangelico, as explained below.

Cell Groups

In 2000, one of the church deacons told me about a training program in Guatemala that was centered around the formation of cell groups. The concept involves small groups of 10 to 30 who meet in homes for Bible study. Neighbors, friends, and co-workers are invited in the atmosphere of hospitality and worship. A visitor who expresses interest in attending sessions regularly will be assigned a Hermano Mayor [literally, “Big Brother,” but without the Orwellian overtones], and will be thought of as a Hermano Menor

[“Little Brother”] for the time being. The role of the Hermano Mayor is to follow up with the Hermano Menor in the event of absences, and to answer questions as necessary. A schematic chart of a typical cell group appears on the next page.

The diagram on page 26 shows the distribution of cell groups in communities served by our church. About 85% of our regular members also participate in cell groups as Hermanos Mayores [Big Brothers]. The number of cell group participants who are not members is in the neighborhood of 375. Thus, although there is considerable overlap between them, the cell groups *in toto* have grown to the point where they exceed the regular membership of the church itself.

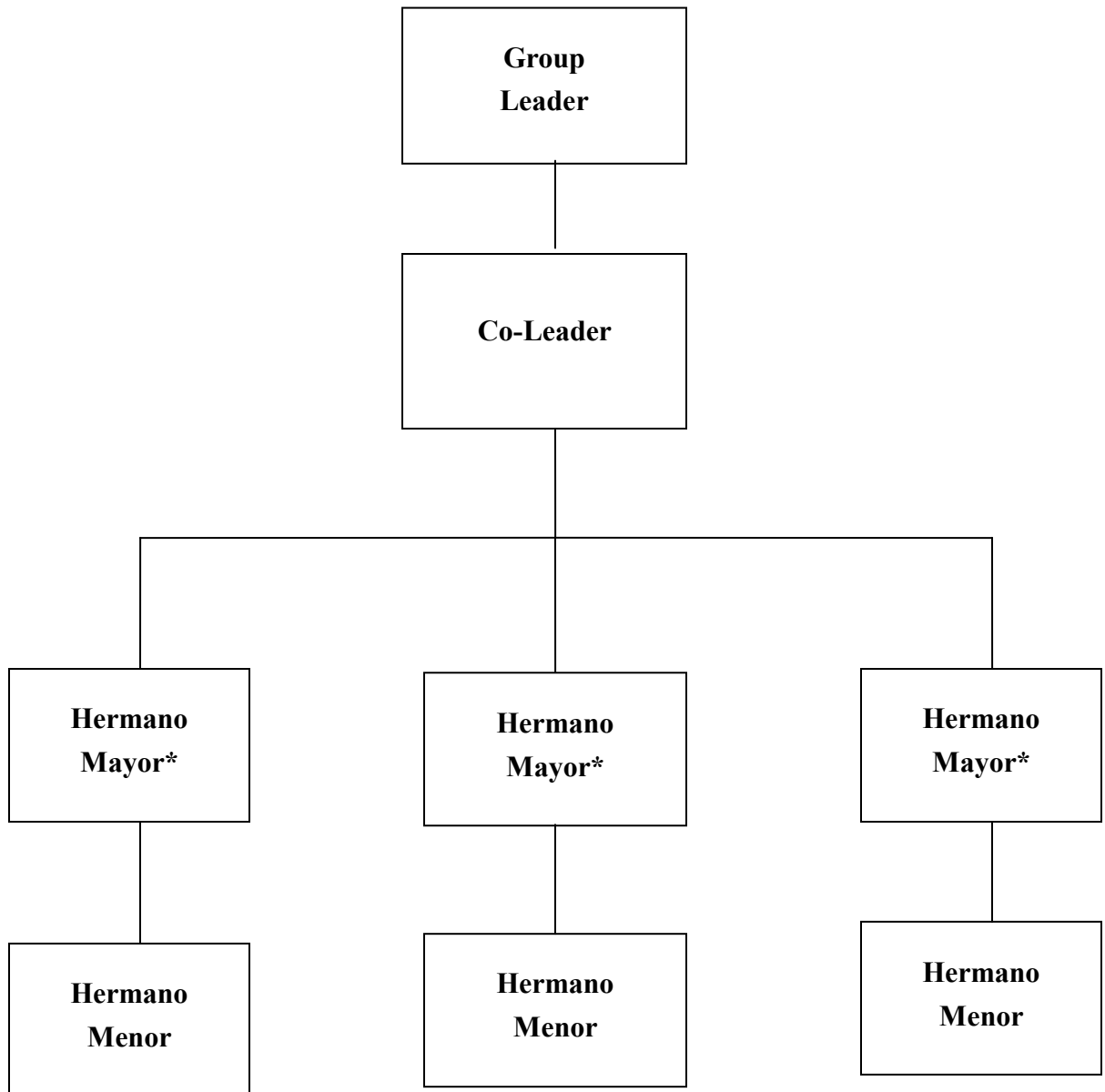
The cell group itself is an evangelical instrument, designed to bring about conversions to the Christian faith. For this reason, every Hermano Mayor is required to be baptized and also a regular church member. Those who serve as cell group leaders or co-leaders must have completed the one-year course in our Leadership Academy [see page 27].

Educational Programs

Although it is undoubtedly higher now, the educational level of my congregation was equivalent to the sixth or seventh grade, by my estimate, back in 2000. The problem is of course doubly complicated by the language barrier. Thus we have a continuing need not only for literacy but for English language skills as well.

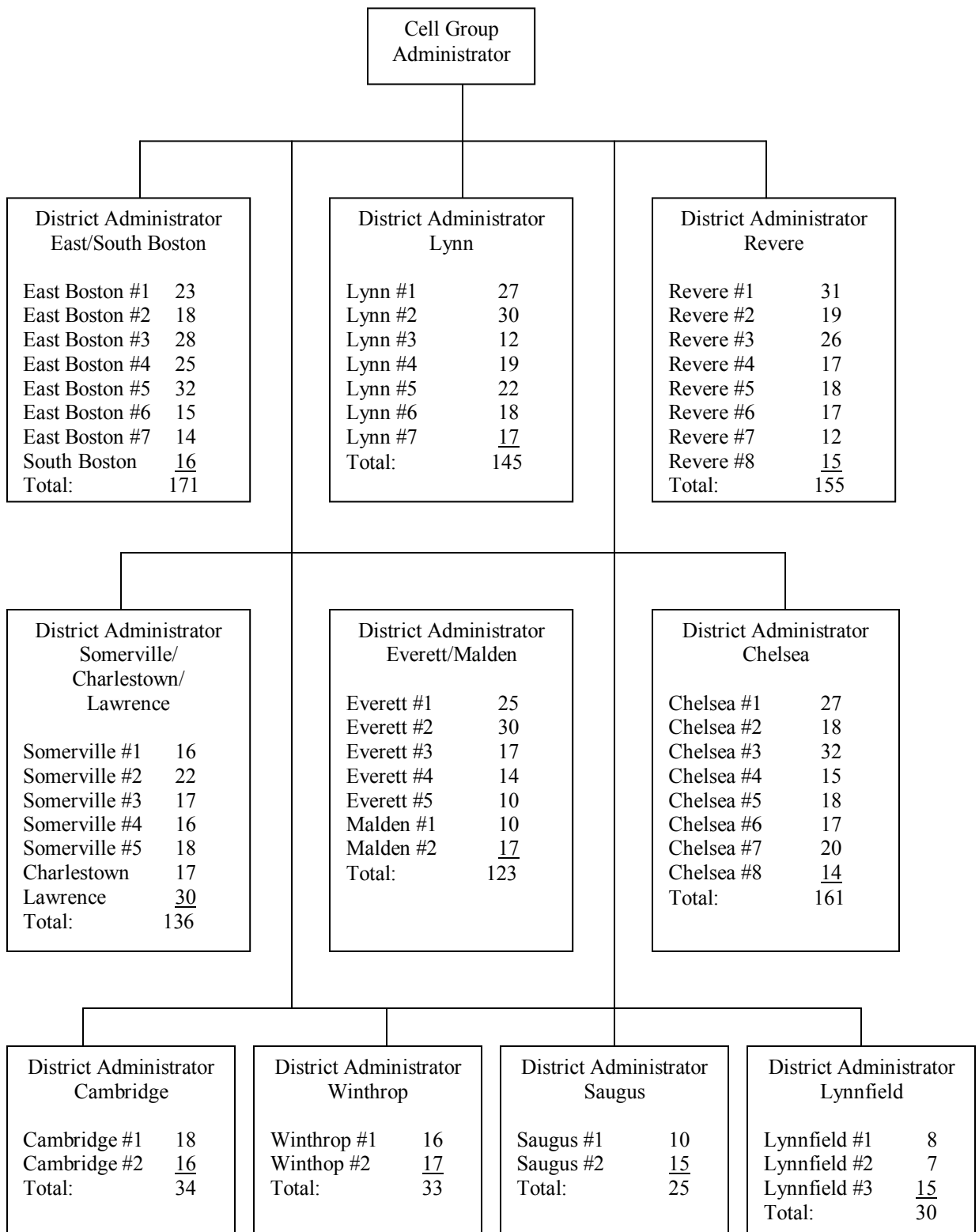
To address the situation, we began by offering literacy classes in Spanish, as well as E.S.L. training. Another effort involved the tutoring of immigrant students, usually of high school age, by adult volunteers from the congregation. Often we found that failing students could in fact do the work, once they understood the assignment. In response to requests, we also developed a G.E.D. program. Using materials supplied by the Commonwealth, the teacher gives instruction both at the church and in students' homes.

A Typical Cell Group



*While the hermano mayor has primary responsibility for the hermano menor, the ministry is a collaborative effort involving the entire cell group.

Cell Group Distribution



Grand Total of Attendees: 1013.

BIBLE INSTITUTE. In recent years, our educational programs have become broader in scope. Under the auspices of the Assemblies of God, we established a Bible Institute [*Instituto Bíblico*] in 2001. Our purpose was to enable well-motivated church members to become certified as A/G clergy. So far, we have graduated 15 students from our own church membership, plus 12 who attended from other congregations in the greater Boston area. They have gone on to serve as faculty, while others have assumed leadership roles in other churches. Still others serve on the staff of the New England Section, A/G. A summary of the four-year curriculum appears in Appendix 3 [p. 136].

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY. In 2001, I traveled to Guatemala and attended a seminar on church growth that featured cell groups and leadership. After I got back, I worked with a few key people in the church to create a program that we refer to as our “Leadership Academy.” Our objective has been two-fold: First, to show our members how to work together as a team to achieve the goals of the church; Second, to provide leaders for our cell groups. At our first graduation of some 20 students, Dr. Alvin Padilla was the guest speaker. A summary of the content of this one-year, trimester program is included in Appendix 3 [p. 137ff].

The Leadership Academy offers students an overall vision of the church in all its various aspects. Joseph Lombardi refers to the acquisition of this comprehensive understanding as *norming*.¹⁶ As I read about this concept, I realized that the Leadership Academy serves the same objective, which is to explain the biblical motivation for our efforts as a church, and to provide training in the processes that enable us to function.

¹⁶ Joseph Lombardi, *Jesus Led a Team* (unpublished manuscript, 2004), 5.

The Tabernáculo Evangelico: An Urban Church?

Having profiled our church, it appears reasonable to ask at this point, Are we an urban congregation? The question seems legitimate, considering that, as Harvey Cox points out, urbanization is one of the chief hallmarks of our time.¹⁷ The city clearly presents enormous opportunities for churches to grow and multiply.

From our history as a congregation, it may appear at first that the Tabernáculo Evangelico contradicts the paradigm of urban ministry. Instead of remaining in the inner city, my church moved from East Boston out to a nearby suburb. Several years later we moved again, closer this time to the city, but still well beyond the inner core.

Did our move to the suburbs jeopardize our role as an agent of shalom in the city? After all, cities themselves have religious roots. In Old Testament times, “The city was a shrine” where “the gods and humankind walked in community.”¹⁸ Lewis Mumford notes that the Greek word *ecclesia* originally referred to a civic gathering in ancient Greece, centuries before it was applied to churches.¹⁹

Recent federal census data, however, shows that the Hispanic population is diversifying through several communities surrounding Boston. Our current location puts us strategically between the well-established Hispanic communities in Chelsea and East Boston, on the one hand, and the growing Hispanic population of Saugus and Lynn.

¹⁷ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 1.

¹⁸ Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City & the People of God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 84.

¹⁹ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, 1961), 155.

Preliminary Conclusions

If I were to ask a Hispanic clergyman whether the church is in a position to help their immigrant members improve their conditions in this country, I have no doubt that the answer would be yes. Why, then, is the church so often reticent, when it comes to the area of education?

I suspect that the reason for the general lack of activity by churches in the field of education is caused by the absence of a vision as to how to go about assuming a leadership role in this area. In many cases, churches have priorities that cause them to neglect the educational needs of parishioners. For example, they may be preoccupied with issues of theology or doctrine that consume their time and resources. Or they may not be sufficiently aware of the problem to take action.

The concept of the learning organization developed by Peter Senge offers a realistic approach to the problem.²⁰ In our educational programs at the Tabernáculo Evangelico we try to address the needs of our congregants systemically. Beginning with cell groups, we seek to provide social support to immigrants who may feel deprived of meaningful interaction with others in their new country. In these small groups, visitors and [we hope] future church members share information about jobs, immigration policies, housing, medical care, language training and educational opportunities for career development. Thus while our primary mission is to preach the gospel, we recognize that we should take a broader view of the situation in which these new arrivals find themselves. This wider approach is fundamental to the methodology of systems thinking presented by Senge, as I understand it.

²⁰ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990).

Although I knew nothing about Senge's strategy while we were creating our programs at the Tabernáculo, I note various confirming parallels between our educational practices and his perspective. From the viewpoint of our individual members, educational programs offer a path toward personal mastery. For the church as an organization, education provides ways to develop a shared vision and promote team learning.

Senge's approach is of course based on secular experience in commercial business settings. In Chapter 3, I will explore the theological basis for our educational efforts, starting with the cell group program. In Chapter 5, I plan to discuss the results of our efforts to date, and consider some implications for our future.

PART II: CONCEPTUALIZATION

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In the previous chapter, I described how our educational activities have evolved over the fifteen years of my service with the Tabernáculo Evangelico. When we first initiated our educational programs, it was with the idea of addressing a critical social need among our immigrant parishioners. Although I could recognize the potential value of our efforts as an evangelical tool, I saw education mainly as one of our services to members, not unlike our job referral network, or support groups, or even the food bank.

Over the years, however, education has become a factor in the development of the Tabernáculo itself. *The Fifth Discipline* offers a perspective on the dynamics at work, as we pursue educational objectives for our members.

The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization

The Fifth Discipline by Peter M. Senge is not a reference source that I consult when I need information or guidance about a particular issue. In fact, neither I nor my board of deacons were aware of this work when we introduced educational programs at the Tabernáculo. Nevertheless, *The Fifth Discipline* often pops up unexpectedly as I go about my ministry. Quotes like the following from the book come to mind: “The loftier the vision, the more uncertain we are how it is to be achieved.”²¹

²¹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990), 249.

There is no loftier a concept that I can imagine than that of the Kingdom envisioned by Jesus. Yet, as Senge suggests, we have no idea how or when it will be realized. We have only a compass — our faith — to point us in the right direction.

I'd like to see a version of this book adapted for pastors and directors of church staff, because I keep seeing parallels between the business situations described in *The Fifth Discipline* and my work with the congregation I serve. The discipline of "Shared Vision" provides an example of what I mean.

Shared Vision

In 1999, I had the opportunity to travel with a group of deacons from my church to El Salvador to visit two of the fast-growing churches in that region. Attendance at these churches is typically measured in the thousands of worshippers. The church buildings themselves are actually reconverted industrial warehouses.

The secret of this phenomenal growth, I was told, is the formation of small cell groups, [*grupos celulares*] that meet one day each week outside of regular services to pray and study. It quickly became clear to me that we needed such a program in Revere. Over the past five years, we have developed our own system of cell groups at my church.

On two different nights during the week, plus Saturdays, we have small group meetings for home study. In the past, I often wondered why these little "microchurches" seem to flourish within a much larger church organization. The answer to this question came to me in the chapter by Senge entitled "Localness." Small groups, he points out, "harness the spirit, enthusiasm, and knowledge of people throughout the organization."²²

²² Ibid., Chapter 14, "Localness," 289.

Up until that time, I had thought of our church primarily as a single group. I believed that we would flourish or fail as a single entity, and therefore we should function only as one body. The dynamics of small groups, however, suggest that a significant benefit comes from the formation of parallel micro-units within the larger organization.

The explanation that Senge offers for this success is that small-scale sub-units provide the ambience in which people can see the results of their efforts and therefore take responsibility for their actions. I don't dispute this, but for immigrant churches I see further advantages.

In the conclusion to the previous chapter, I described how members of our cell groups assist each other in coping with the American host culture. For the church overall, moreover, cell groups provide a significant financial benefit, since our 1,000 or so weekly attendees contribute a small offering at each meeting. In addition, the management of these small groups provides valuable experience for our cadre of volunteers, most of whom have limited opportunities for leadership in their daily lives outside of the church. The relationship between the leader and co-leader of each cell group provides a mentoring situation that encourages personal development for future service.

On the other hand, the cell group program has pitfalls that can lead to disaster for the congregation as a whole. The proliferation of so many small groups may produce factionalism, when individual cells seek to assert a degree of independent identity. In one case, we had a cell group leader who went so far as to tell his group members, "Don't listen to the pastor," and "Don't listen to the board of deacons." This leader evidently saw himself as the "pastor" of a small congregation.

If left unattended, this matter could have snow-balled into a crisis for our church. As it happened, the leader eventually left the Tabernáculo, and took some twenty members with him. Coincidentally, the following month we had an influx of members who had been waiting in the wings for this challenge to our leadership to be resolved. In the wake of this episode, we experienced a period of *shalom* followed by unexpectedly rapid growth in our membership.

The cell group model can also produce competition among the leaders themselves, as they strive to move up within the church organization. For example, regional leaders seek to promote themselves or colleagues as nominees for the board of deacons, in advance of our annual plenary meeting. The real danger, as I see it, is that one cell group district can potentially acquire control of the church overall. My role as chairman of the deacons is to balance the representation of cell group districts on the 14-member board. Occasionally I have to remind our leadership team — usually in the format of open prayer — that the leader of all is the servant of all, as Jesus cautioned his disciples.

As principal custodian of our church's shared vision, I find it necessary to visit cell group meetings regularly, to emphasize their connection to the Tabernáculo. This effort is essential because many cell group members don't bother to attend regular services at the Tabernáculo. We also hold weekly meetings of the group leaders, to facilitate the flow of communication between the church and cell groups.

In spite of our rapid growth in recent years — which I attribute in large part to cell groups — it is clear that the program has to be managed. In other words, cell groups carry risks along with rewards. Without careful direction, our shared vision can easily fracture. Partly for this reason, we have diversified our educational programs, to keep us focused on our purposes as a church. The Leadership Academy in particular has served to educate

our leaders in our organizational vision. Through continuing education, I believe we are taking on the characteristics of a learning organization like that described by Senge.

Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry

In the introduction to *Seek the Peace of the City*, Dr. Eldin Villafaña cites a powerful observation from the book of Proverbs: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” [29:18a; KJV].²³ In a triumph of inspiration over the literal translation of Scripture, the 17th-century scholars got it right, in my view. Other biblical versions include: “Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint” [RSV]; and “Where there is no authority, the people break loose” [NEB].

The KJV version places the emphasis where it belongs, that is, upon the vision or “mental model,” as Senge would call it, that sustains the community of faith in the pursuit of its spiritual mission.

What are the elements of this vision? *Seek the Peace of the City* provides the components for a mental model of the mission to which the Hispanic Pentecostal church is called, in the context of the city. Using Jeremiah 29:7a as a point of departure, Dr. Villafaña explores the goals of the Hispanic Pentecostal church vis-à-vis the urban constituencies that it is called upon to serve. He first describes the role of scholarship in articulating the purposes of the church. He sees this role in terms of three main aspects: *sierva* [service], *santificadora* [sanctification], and *sanadora* [healing]. He then applies this model to the church itself by advocating “social spirituality” as a balanced response to the church’s biblical mandate.

²³ Eldin Villafaña, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 2.

Dr. Villafañe sees the *barrios* of the inner city as fertile ground for the planting of churches. Focusing on Boston, he calls for churches to enter into partnership [*koinonia*] with the economically and politically disenfranchised ethnic groups of the city, to address their needs through gospel ministry. In the challenging environment of the city, he points out, successful ministry requires an attitude of “burning patience,” that is, a passionate enthusiasm tempered by the recognition that God’s work, not man’s, is what is being done.

The Hispanic minority requires contextualized ministry that is made credible by demonstrating sensitivity to Hispanic cultural perspectives, according to Dr. Villafañe. Such ministry must adopt a wholistic approach, one that simultaneously addresses the spiritual, social and material concerns of the people.

As I read this book, I was struck by the parallels between my pastoral career in Boston and the issues discussed by Dr. Villafañe. Two issues in particular stood out: social service and education.

Service to the community [*diakonia*] quickly became my primary concern at the time I joined the Tabernáculo Evangelico as pastor in 1991. About 90 percent of the church members at the time were undocumented immigrants. Most came from El Salvador, but several other countries were represented. As a result, I began assisting them in numerous practical ways, as previously described on page 21.

Over my fifteen years with the Tabernáculo, I have tried to connect my ministry with the needs of my church members. Dr. Villafañe refers to this as “a social spirituality.” Churches like El Tabernáculo, it seems to me, must help their immigrant parishioners cope with the economic, political and social problems they typically face.

The second theme, education, plays a critical role in the overall ministry of the

Tabernáculo. Even more than financial resources, I believe the greatest need of my flock is for education. Soon after I arrived, we began offering literacy classes in Spanish, as well as E.S.L. training. Later, in response to repeated requests, we developed a G.E.D. program.

The development of our formal education programs was detailed in Chapter 1. It seems relevant to ask at this point, Does education serve as an agent of *shalom*? Insofar as it leads to social justice, for both individuals and the community in general, I would say yes. Thus education must do more than simply advance the material well-being of students. And in the case of immigrants, education should be more than merely a tool for adjustment to American culture. The church is in a position to demonstrate the moral and spiritual dimension in which education may be applied to “seek the peace of the city.”

Biblical Ethics and Social Change

This book by Stephen C. Mott develops the theological underpinnings for the role of the church as an agent of social change. The type of change that Mott talks about is progress toward social justice.

The world is God’s creation, but “evil resides in the social order as well as in our personal life.”²⁴ The Bible provides a vision of a remedy for the world, in the prophetic coming of the kingdom of God [Rev. 11:15]. Until that time is fulfilled, however, the church stands as the “agent of God’s reign.”²⁵

²⁴ Stephen C. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 17.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 137.

The effort to purge evil from the social structure anticipates God's justice. In the Bible, "justice is biased in favor of the poor and weak of the earth."²⁶ Building the reign of God does not in itself equate to a social program, but "faithfulness to its demands for justice necessitates social programs and social struggle."²⁷

For Mott, Biblical ethics are essentially Christian ethics. The solution to any ethical problem thus converges toward the question, What does the Gospel have to say about the matter? With this in mind, I've begun to address a major issue affecting my mostly immigrant congregation: the proposed criminalization of undocumented aliens living in this country, as contained in legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and forwarded to the Senate in 2006.

The question of legal status for immigrants has even begun to affect my sponsoring denomination, the Assemblies of God [A/G] — and therefore our local church. Earlier I described how we conduct a Bible Institute [Instituto Bíblico] through which we prepare some of our members for certification as A/G ministers. According to rules promulgated by the General Council, A/G, I may not recommend graduates of the Instituto for certification unless they have legal standing in this country, because certified ministers must be eligible to accept salaried posts at other churches if offered.

Our educational programs at the Tabernáculo may thus be adversely affected by proposed changes in the immigration laws. Ironically, one of the assumptions behind our educational efforts is that students will remain in this country to pursue their new lives and careers here. Evidently we need to remain flexible.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

The potential criminalization of immigrants presents a serious dilemma, not only for me personally, but likewise for the Tabernáculo. As I understand it, anyone providing aid and comfort to the undocumented may conceivably become criminally liable as well. Whose call then shall we answer: the governing authorities, concerning which the Apostle Paul wrote, "He who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed" [Rom. 13:2 RSV]; or the call of Jesus, who said, "I was a stranger and ye took me in" [Matt. 25:35 KJV]?

I've begun preaching about this issue at Sunday services. The object of my sermons is to calm the fears of my parishioners, who have expressed their concerns in various ways. For example, our church recently sponsored a concert at an auditorium in Lynn, for which we sold more than 2,500 tickets. Before the concert, we received at least 75 phone calls from people who said they were fearful that they might be picked up by the "migra" if they attended. I had to convince them that immigration officials would not enter the premises during this event.

To address the concerns of my church members, I remind them that our church is here to serve their needs. As witnesses of the kingdom, manifested through the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we open our doors to all who seek God's justice. I emphasize to them that they are not alone. The role of the church is to protect the defenseless, as the good shepherd cares for the sheep.

For me personally, I find no other option than to support my parishioners morally and spiritually, even if it contravenes civil law. I recognize the concerns of the government, particularly regarding terrorism, but as a pastor I must give voice to my flock, a substantial number of whom are politically disenfranchised. In this question I draw inspiration from the ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was jailed in Alabama

for his activities during the struggle for civil rights there.

More broadly, where should the church position itself in this situation? Mott points out that “the church as a visible sign of the Reign of God produces social change in the surrounding society.”²⁸ In his chapter on evangelism, Mott makes clear that proclaiming the gospel is not enough. Preaching the word also requires social action. I’m not clear about the form such “strategic noncooperation” should take, with respect to undocumented immigrants. Conceivably it may lead to civil disobedience. If so, I know that anything I do will be valid, from a biblical viewpoint, only insofar as I serve the goal of “making real the sovereignty of God.”²⁹

Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation

In a world beset by turmoil, Miroslav Volf asks, “How should we approach the problems of identity and otherness and deal with the conflicts that rage around them?”³⁰ After exploring the dynamics of exclusion and moral justice, he finds the answer “in the name of the one truly innocent victim and what he stood for, the crucified Messiah of God.”³¹

At the Tabernáculo, I find myself confronting the problems discussed in *Exclusion and Embrace* every working day. For example, the question is under debate in the U.S. Senate, at this time of writing [Oct. 2006], as to how to resolve the status of several

²⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

³⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 20.

³¹ Ibid., p. 84.

million immigrants living in this country. At my parochial level, our church members encounter discrimination regularly, based on their ethnicity and language. But not all of this cultural injustice comes from the Anglo society outside our doors.

Sometimes we experience rejection within our own congregation. In 1997, for example, I had to break up a fight — with help from deacons and parents — that had broken out in the men's room of our church among boys from El Salvador and Guatemala.

In 2002, this kind of schism erupted again, although in a more passive way. At a youth service, I noticed that the young people sat in two separate groups with several rows of empty pews between them. Those who were born in this country and were bilingual kept together; the foreign born, who spoke only Spanish, formed a second group. When this same division showed up in Sunday school, I knew that something had to be done.

I went first to the board of deacons to present the problem as I saw it. Next I called a special meeting of parents, to alert them of the situation. Finally, I began a series of meetings with the young people, to talk about the spirit of *koinonia* in our multicultural church. Using biblical texts, I explained to them how, in spite of our cultural differences, we are all equal before God. This series of bible studies concluded with a special Sunday “Servicio de Unidad” in which each young person carried a white candle into the sanctuary as a symbol of unity in Christ. To emphasize our need for humility and repentance, we all washed one another's feet, making certain that the opposing “gringo-Latinos” and the “mojados” performed this ablution on each other. As a final gesture toward reconciliation, we had an overall embrace amidst expressions of amity and love.

As follow-up to this healing service, we formed soccer teams among the young

people, while being careful to ensure that formerly opposing youths played on the same side. In addition, with two of the deacons I chaperoned a group of our youngsters to the annual “Winterfest” youth event in Pennsylvania, sponsored by the Assemblies of God. We were scrupulous about seeing that youths from the two groups shared hotel rooms.

All of this, I find, is germane to Volf, who discussed the dilemma presented to us by boundaries and borders. He points out that we are faced with “the impossible choice between a chaos without boundaries and oppression with them.”³² For undocumented immigrants, compunction over violating U.S. law by entering this country illegally is a minor consideration at best. On the other hand, few native-born Americans would simply eliminate border restrictions and lift all barriers to entry.

Who is oppressed by boundaries? Those on both sides of the border, Volf would say. Each side feels itself to be exploited by the other, but Jesus calls them all to repentance.³³

When I ask my foreign-born parishioners why they came to this country, I get a variety of answers, but they usually come down to “survival” as the reason. Whether they were escaping the fighting in El Salvador and Guatemala, some years ago, or fleeing economic hardship more recently, they typically say that they saw no other option than to leave their homes and trek north. Moreover, strong family loyalty among Hispanics ensures that the circle of survival extends beyond the individual to include those members who remain back home — children, spouses, parents, brothers, sisters, etc.

Among native-born Americans, most apparently favor improved frontier control as indispensable to a resolution of “the immigration problem.” Responding to political

³² Ibid., p. 63.

³³ Ibid., p. 113.

pressure, the U.S. Congress has appropriated funds for construction of an additional 700 miles of fencing along the border with Mexico. Volf, however, calls this “exclusion as abandonment. Like the priest and the Levite, we simply cross to the other side and pass by, minding our own business.”³⁴

Ultimately, Volf finds that reconciliation between people in contention “depends on the will to embrace the other,” and therefore requires “a mutual embrace.”³⁵ Retributive justice, he points out, merely perpetuates a cycle of vengeance. In the final analysis, reconciliation can only be achieved “within the embrace of the triune God.”³⁶

Faith Works: Lessons from the Life of an Activist Preacher

The central premise of *Faith Works*³⁷ is two-fold. First, the author seeks to convince the reader that ordinary people can make a significant difference in the lives of others by becoming engaged in charitable volunteer work. Secondly, as people of faith we are called to contribute our time, talent and resources to those who need help. Thus by serving others we fulfill ourselves spiritually as well.

Written for the general reader, *Faith Works* is a memoir with a purpose. In a series of 15 “lessons” framed in practical terms, the author builds his case for uncompensated community service by ordinary individuals. He draws heavily upon his experience as a minister of Jesus Christ, but the career of Jim Wallis is secondary to his goal of motivating the reader to seek volunteer opportunities. The examples he gives from his

³⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 225.

³⁷ Jim Wallis, *Faith Works: Lessons from the Life of an Activist Preacher* (New York: Random House, 2000).

pastoral career are intended to reinforce his argument that churches have a vital role to play in community development and renewal.

Faith Works reads like a manual for volunteer workers and a scrapbook of success stories for those who might get involved in non-profit activities. As the pastor of a Hispanic immigrant church, I am interested in the question of how Wallis's approach can prove useful in a Latino context. One particular episode from my own pastoral experience dramatized for me the power of faith works.

In March, 2001, I journeyed with three members of the Mount Carmel Church [the predecessor of the Tabernáculo Evangelico] to El Salvador. Our intention was to learn first-hand about conditions there in the aftermath of recent earthquakes, and a major hurricane. We wanted to do what we could to help.

During the trip, I visited a small church in the village of Hisalpo, in the department of Sonsonate, where I was invited to conduct a wedding service for the pastor, who was himself getting married that day. When I arrived, I noticed a crowd at another church nearby, where people were receiving donations of clothing, meals, and health screening services. Buses were bringing in people from surrounding areas. Later that day I met the pastor of that church, who described to me the method behind his church's program.

Pastor "Toby" explained that they distribute the food and clothing first, and then invite people to stay for religious services. He said that the material gifts are what attract people initially; they provide the "hook" that brings them in. His philosophy was summarized as follows: *Hay que alimentar primero el estómago y después sanar el alma* [First we must nourish the stomach, and afterwards heal the soul.].

His approach impressed me because it showed how churches can provide social services even in a poor rural area of El Salvador. How much more could an American church do, I thought, in such a place? This experience helped me envision ways to develop a realistic missions program in Central America.

We began by helping various churches that had been damaged by earthquakes, but more recently we have expanded our missions program significantly. We support the planting of new churches in Central America, but we also distribute free-will offerings of goods and materials in public places or in churches with which we have no regular connection. For example, those of our parishioners who travel to Guatemala or El Salvador will sometimes take clothing, school supplies, books, hygienic items and over-the-counter medicines with them in extra suitcases.

One of our members went so far as to enlist her husband and three children in this effort. In October, 2005, she flew to Guatemala with five pieces of additional luggage. We gave her a letter of introduction to any church who might accept goods for donation, but she also preached the Gospel in public plazas of various towns, after which she would give away items to people on hand. We take up special offerings each month to cover the cost of this activity.

The story above suggests to me that Wallis comes at the same problem as we are addressing through our missions program, but from a different direction. Our church seeks to build faith through our donative works. Wallis, however, advocates using the power of faith-based organizations to promote social welfare in general. Projected across the entire society, he says, the nation as a whole stands to benefit socially and morally from such efforts. Either way, it seems to me, both purposes are served.

To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City

*To Live in Peace*³⁸ is the story of the New Song ministry of Sandtown, a 72-block neighborhood of western Baltimore, MD. This inner-city mission began in 1986 when Pastor Mark Gornik and a friend, Allen Tibbels, moved to Sandtown with their families.

Pastor Gornik shows that churches, in spite of their limited resources, are well-suited for community development, because they “give practical expression to God’s love and justice.”³⁹ Churches are in a position to counteract the “shattering” of civil society in the ghetto, caused by market-driven forces, among other factors. Through the gospel message of reconciliation, the church can reach hearts as well as minds, and inspire inner-city residents to join in the redevelopment of their community.

Among the resources the church can provide is a place for children to go after school, and avoid the dangers of the street. For young men it offers an alternative to the allurements outside. At the same time, however, the church must become a church of the streets. By galvanizing resources from both within and without, the church organizes for transformation of the inner city into a peaceable civic environment in which critical human needs are addressed.

According to Pastor Gornik, the church pursues its efforts through a three-part program based on presence, prayer, and public activity. The biblical narrative of Nehemiah, although not a blueprint for community re-development, nevertheless embodies these three essential aspects of reform. The New Song Community Church of Baltimore began its work at the local level, but support from private foundations

³⁸Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).

³⁹Ibid., p. 113.

in various localities proved vital. Public agencies later became involved, as New Song developed housing, education, and health programs, as well as a jobs network.

From a broader perspective, the problem of rebuilding the inner cities elsewhere in this country and beyond requires recognition that God “has not abandoned, forsaken or forgotten the poor.”⁴⁰ Armed with this vision, community leaders can begin to confront the forces of rejection working from without and despair from within. Recognizing that the collective sin of the community — from the neighborhood up to the nation — permitted the ruin of the inner city, only the combined efforts of these entities can reverse the process of decay, and recover the *shalom* that God intends for the city.

In the course of my pastoral career, I have looked for ways to connect my ministry closely to the needs of my church members. This I think is one of the main points of *To Live in Peace*. One of the greatest needs of my congregation, as noted previously, is for education. In the first chapter, I described some of our efforts to help our parishioners to acquire basic literacy skills, both in Spanish and English. In addition to basic competencies, however, education has implications for immigrant Hispanics that extend beyond economic advancement or success in adjusting to American culture. In my sermons, I point out to my congregation that education provides a tool for understanding the American political and using it to improve the social conditions under which they live.

The form of street ministry described by Pastor Gornik is a testimony to the power of faith in overcoming apparently insuperable obstacles to achieve *shalom* in the broken

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 206.

society of the inner city. I presume, however, that other types of ministry have a legitimate role to play in Christ's service. Suburban ministry may offer less dramatic possibilities than service in the ghetto, but the needs are nonetheless similar. Like the New Song church, for example, we maintain a job bank that provides a lifeline for immigrants who struggle to make ends meet. We also have a support group for single mothers who are victims of domestic abuse.

In recent years we have extended our outreach efforts into Latin America. In 2001, as previously mentioned, I traveled with three church members on a mission to El Salvador. While there, we attended a training seminar in Guatemala on methods for enhancing church membership growth. The key to the program was the formation of cell groups. As explained in Chapter 1, the concept involves small groups of 10 to 30 who meet in homes for Bible study. Neighbors, friends and co-workers are invited to share in an atmosphere of hospitality and worship.

At first, I thought of cell groups mainly as an evangelical tool for bringing about conversions to Christ. But the surprising success of this program [we currently have more than 1,000 attendees] leads me to think that a broader need is being met. At the small-group level, cell groups address the desire for knowledge and understanding of our faith. In effect, cell groups fill a vital educational need for those seeking a church home. For us as a congregation, cell groups have been a lesson in God's abundance; we have experienced strong growth in recent months, a fact which I attribute in no small degree to this outreach effort. In spite of extensive remodeling to our present facility in Revere, to accommodate new members and their families, I can nevertheless foresee the day when we may have to move again.

Recognizing that we can't all work in the inner city, with God's help we can nevertheless respond to the challenges around us, no matter how daunting they may be. This I trust is the encouraging message of Pastor Gornik for us at the Tabernáculo, as we seek to fulfill our role in urban ministry.

City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church

The explosive growth of cities, especially in developing countries, constitutes a challenge to the church in the 21st century. But as Robert C. Linthicum points out, the Bible itself is an urban book.⁴¹ Biblical personages from the patriarch Abraham to the apostle Paul were people of the city.

Nowadays, the struggle is between God and the full spectrum of urban enticements — power, possessions, and prestige. From the officials of the city down to its poorest inhabitants, all are vulnerable to seduction by such diversions.

As Linthicum sees it, each city has an “angel” or spiritual essence. God and Satan are engaged in battle for the spirituality of the city. The role of the church is to confront the evils that threaten the city, not only at the individual but also at the corporate level.

God's vision for the city was expressed by Jesus as “the kingdom of God.” By analogy with the new Jerusalem envisioned in Revelation, the kingdom of God represents the fulfillment of the destiny toward which the city must move. The church's mission is to guide the “powers and principalities” of the city by providing a model of the kingdom.

Effective urban ministry, like the city itself, is a matter of corporate, rather than simply individual, responsibility. St. Paul enumerated the various aspects of the pastoral

⁴¹ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 21.

role [apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers]. The church organization is designed to show members how to employ their own gifts in these diverse roles.

Successful ministry to the community requires the church to ally itself with the people it seeks to serve. Working with a coalition of community leaders, the church takes a reflective approach to problem solving. Gradually the organization formed to address the problem gains a sense of empowerment that will in the long run enable the church to disengage from the operation.

Community projects may be opposed and even derailed by those with a vested interest in the status quo, as well as by those seeking to take advantage of the programs themselves for personal benefit. Corrective action involves confronting the evil without entering into conflict with the perpetrators themselves. The church thus seeks “to practice the kingdom in a way that comforts the city’s afflicted and afflicts the city’s comfortable.”⁴²

In my role as the pastor of a Hispanic Pentecostal congregation, I find much in this book that is relevant to my ministry. Nothing, however, rang true more profoundly for me than Linthicum’s discussion of the pastor’s role as educator and teacher.⁴³

When I began my pastoral career, I saw my role as simple and one-dimensional: it was to win souls for Christ. I felt I had to do everything in my power, with the help of God, to make the church grow. I failed to appreciate the significance of the reference in Ephesians 4:11 [KJV] to “pastors and teachers.” A careful examination of this verse is instructive.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.

⁴² Ibid., p. 106.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 188–192.

It is noteworthy that the first three categories above [apostles, prophets, evangelists] are listed as separate items; but the last two [pastors and teachers] are treated equally, from a syntactical viewpoint. Apparently St. Paul conceived them in combination, as if they were both aspects of a single role.

Early on, a “teacher” [in a religious setting] was to my mind someone who conducted Sunday school classes for children, or led adult Bible study. I had completely overlooked the broader role of a teacher, which is to help others develop their God-given talents, so that they may employ these gifts in Christ’s service as effectively as possible.

Linthicum stresses that “God does not give to one man or woman the job of being the pastor of the church.”⁴⁴ Instead, the pastor is dedicated to “developing the God-given gifts of congregation members to do their ministry.”⁴⁵ In recent years, the educational programs at the Tabernáculo have been moving in the direction that Linthicum describes. Two examples of such activities are of special significance.

In our cell groups, members learn what it means to be born again, and discuss the steps involved in making a decision for Christ. Members of cell groups who join the church and show aptitude for leadership are invited to attend our Leadership Academy for training designed to equip them for future positions of responsibility in the church.

Starting in 2007, we plan to initiate an accredited Bachelor’s degree program directed by the “Escuela Teológica de Nueva York” [Theological School of New York (Bronx)], under the auspices of the Spanish Eastern District of the Assemblies of God. I see this program as an extension of the A/G Bible Institute that will help our members to mature in their faith.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 190.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

Why is education important? Because, among other reasons, it helps prepare the church to receive God's blessings, among them the opportunity to grow. By educating ourselves in our faith, we increase our ability to convey it to others whom God may send our way.

Christ and Culture

Immigrant churches like the Tabernáculo are in a position to appreciate the influence of culture on the character of ministry in an urban setting. In *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr confronts "the enduring problem," as he calls it, of reconciling the demands of Christian discipleship with the "social heritage" of the believer.⁴⁶ Drawing upon the writings of individual thinkers as well as schools of theological thought, from ancient to modern times, the author proposes five general categories of ethical approaches to the problem of Christ and culture.

First is the "New Law" approach, which Niebuhr also describes as "Christ against culture." The early churches of the first few centuries A.D., which flourished in isolation from the ambient society, fit this type.

The second approach seeks to harmonize Christ with culture, The "Christ of culture" is seen as the fulfillment of cultural ideals. The medieval French cleric Abélard portrayed Christ as a "great moral teacher" who was "doing in a higher degree what Plato and Aristotle did before him."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951 [Rev. ed. 2001]).

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

The third approach — “Christ above culture” — emphasizes a unique relation between God and human culture. The relationship, as articulated by St. Thomas Aquinas, is essentially hierarchical. It is a centrist position represented by the Catholic Church.

The fourth approach, called “dualist,” leads the believer into a complex array of paradoxical ideas. God is both wrathful and merciful. Christ came as the Redeemer of humankind, yet humans cannot free themselves from sin. His aim, he said was “to fulfill the law,” but he found himself consistently at odds with the Pharisees and Sadducees. The church, though ordained of God, is defective at best. The dualist is left to oscillate between the mundane realities of the culture in which he lives, and the expectations of his spiritual calling.

The fifth approach, the “conversionist,” views Christ as transforming culture. A dramatic example of this orientation is that of the apostle Paul.

In practice, the various categories overlap and intermix among themselves, since “no person or group conforms completely to one type.”⁴⁸ The typologist’s “enterprise is directed neither toward explanation nor evaluation, but toward understanding and appreciation.”⁴⁹

My first reaction to the title ‘Christ and Culture’ was a feeling of mild confusion, recalling that “in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female” [Gal. 3:28 KJV], as Niebuhr points out.⁵⁰ I asked myself, What does Christ have to do with culture? Perhaps the “enduring problem” of Christ and culture says more about humankind than it does about Christ.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. xxxix.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 237.

This book serves as a reminder that there are many different perspectives on Jesus, and various possible answers to the question that Jesus posed to his disciples: “Whom do ye say that I am?” [Mark 8:29]. In the congregation that I serve as pastor, I have seen evidence of all the types mentioned by Niebuhr, at various times and to different degrees. Our practices of fasting and holding retreats, for example, no doubt reflect the first type — “Christ against culture” — which favors withdrawal from the society outside.

Among the various Hispanic congregations that I have served in Massachusetts and Connecticut over a period of twenty-five years, I have noted a wide variety of beliefs and practices that are in some ways parallel to the types described by Niebuhr. Such differences cut across diverse areas of life, ranging from biblical doctrine to personal habits and attitudes.

Analysis of these differences will be more fully developed in the next chapter. For now, I will simply note a tendency that seems to prevail in ethnic churches. Particularly for Hispanics who come from Central America, the church is more than a spiritual home: it is a cultural refuge as well. Such an orientation, however, leads to ethnocentrism. To this extent, it seems to me, we become a secular organization that does good works, rather than a religious entity.

My sponsoring denomination, the Assemblies of God, places considerable emphasis upon the receipt of Jesus by every member as his or her personal savior. We also refer to this experience as being “born again.” Our goal is to help each believer achieve a direct and personal experience of Christ’s redeeming power.

Such an approach transcends cultural values, and looks toward Christ’s kingdom: “My kingdom is not of this world” [John 18:36]. But it is a baffling concept. Nicodemus,

for example, asked, “How can these things be?” when told by Jesus, “Ye must be born again” [John 3:9,7]. Indeed, Niebuhr concludes that “the enduring problem” has no definitive solution. As he sees it:

Yet it must be evident that neither extension nor refinement of study could bring us to the conclusive result that would enable us to say, “This is the Christian answer.”⁵¹

Does this mean that education has no role to play in the mission of the church? No, but it suggests that education is not in itself sufficient to lead the church toward the kingdom. Is education therefore unnecessary? Some churches believe it is, as I will show in the next chapter. However, they dispense with education at some risk to their future, and to the detriment of believers, it seems to me. I will undertake to demonstrate why this is so, in the final chapter.

Jesus Led a Team

In this short work, Joseph Lombardi offers a vision of the church as a “team-based ministry.”⁵² Beginning with the trinity, Lombardi goes on to describe a philosophy of organization that is collaborative rather than hierarchical.

Early in my career, I saw the church as substantially a hierarchical enterprise, remembering how Jesus said to his disciples, “without me ye can do nothing” [John 15:5b KJV]. But Jesus more than leveled the playing field when he said, “And whoever of you would be chieftest, shall be the servant of all” [Mark 10:44 KJV].

Dr. Lombardi sees church ministry as a team effort in which leaders remain flexible and responsive to the needs and suggestions of the flock they serve. For example, in my

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 231.

⁵² Joseph Lombardi, *Jesus Led a Team* (Unpublished paper, n.d.), v.

early years with the Tabernáculo, we struggled financially because many of our members sent their tithes to their home churches, principally in El Salvador and Guatemala, where they grew up. Eventually the situation was rectified, but in an unexpected way.

In Chapter 1 [p. 23], I described how in 2001 I visited El Salvador with a small team of church leaders, as part of a missionary undertaking. The idea for the project came from a video tape that one of our parishioners received from his former pastor in El Salvador, showing virtually complete destruction of the church to which he had belonged there. Moved by this sad spectacle, we decided as a congregation to mount an independent mission to El Salvador, led by myself, together with my co-pastor, and joined by the supervisor of our member recruitment program and one of our deacons.

The benefits to the churches we helped in El Salvador are mentioned in Chapter 1, but our efforts proved educational for our congregation back home. It showed us that our own attitudes needed to be re-examined as well. For example, our narrow cultural focus was pointed up by this global outreach activity, as explained below.

Considering the array of obstacles facing Hispanics in this country — including ethnic discrimination, economic hardship, and the barrier — it seems understandable that Hispanic churches would withdraw into themselves. After all, the church provides a cultural refuge where people can affirm their common heritage. Such an orientation, however, looks inward, and therefore runs counter to what I see as the true spirit of Christianity. As John 3:16 tells us, “For God so loved the world. . .” The mission to El Salvador represents in part an effort to change our somewhat parochial outlook.

As a result of this effort, our congregation became more conscious of their commitment to their own church. Knowing that we are helping churches in El Salvador

and Guatemala, our members are disposed to contribute to more generously. This additional support has made it possible for me to become their minister full-time. Moreover, I was eventually able to hire 4 part-time employees as the nucleus of a staff.

Especially gratifying is the fact that I have more funds available for us to invest in educational programs to develop the God-given talents of our members. We now have a core of people who effectively comprise a “learning team”⁵³ that can conduct Sunday morning services — to include music — with comparatively little help from me.

St. Paul expressed the team concept when he described believers as “God’s fellow workers” [1 Cor 3:9].⁵⁴ Teams, however, need to recognize and adjust to changes going on around them, as Dr. Lombardi points out in Chapter 7, “Letting Go of the Old Ways.” This advice applies in particular to the immigrant church, as I will explain in Chapter 3.

On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent

Of the source references used, this work by Gustavo Gutiérrez offers the clearest expression I’ve seen of the theology that underlies the educational programs at the Tabernáculo, and in my view, of the whole immigrant church itself. I say this not simply because the author is Latin-American like me. For Gutiérrez, the central question in *On Job* is, “How are we to talk to God in view of the suffering of the innocent?”⁵⁵ This question is of fundamental importance, because it speaks to the basis of religion itself. After all, what motivates the impulse to know God, if not the reality of human suffering, or the prospect of it? Even praise implies that blessings can be taken away.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁴ The Spanish translation is even more collegial: “En efecto, nosotros somos colaboradores al servicio de Dios” [NIV].

⁵⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 51.

For us in the 21st century, the tale of Job touches upon our deepest concerns as human beings. Job undergoes a spectacular fall, but his situation encompasses the fears of all humankind in whatever time and place. Each of us is exposed to the hazards to which Job is subjected — whether the death of loved ones, the ravages of disease, the loss of social position or destruction of property. Thus we are all like Job, even if we are not facing extreme duress. Unexpected misfortune, in particular, is especially likely to be experienced as injustice, especially by the victim. Nowadays, Job would ask, Why me?

Seeing Job overwhelmed by bitterness and despair, we naturally ask, Where is God? Where is the loving Creator, the Father of humankind? Does God simply abandon his children to the whims of time and chance?

In Part 1 of *On Job*, Gustavo Gutiérrez discusses the relationship between retribution and disinterestedness in the context of our relationship with God. Retribution implies that God takes care of the righteous by ensuring both their material and spiritual well-being.

To my mind, the figure of Job, before he is “touched” by Satan, is like the upright man in Psalm 1, “whose delight is in the law of the Lord.” True to the retributive concept, he is like a tree that grows by a river, and “in all that he does, he prospers” [Ps. 1:3].

The relationship between the children of Israel and Jehovah in the Old Testament is in many ways retributive. On more than one occasion God finds himself complaining about the ingratitude and rebelliousness of his chosen people. After the golden calf episode, for example, “the Lord sent a plague upon the people” [Ex. 32:35]. Eventually, Jehovah sentenced them to an extra forty years of desert wandering for their disobedience [Num. 32:13]. All of this expresses a covenantal relationship between the Israelites and their God, a *quid pro quo* that emphasizes reward and punishment.

The story of Job takes issue with this perspective. Once Job is beset with afflictions, all bets are off, where retributive religion is concerned. At that point we are in the area of life discussed by Rabbi Harold Kushner under the title, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. We are left to ask, Is there anything we can do to affect our relationship with God?

As an alternative to retributive religion, Gustavo Gutiérrez emphasizes compassion for the poor. Why? Because service to the least and lowest of society is the essence of a disinterested relationship. In other words, it is purely a non-retributive affair. The proper response to social injustice and exploitation is to reflect back to God his gratuitous love for us, even at the cost of life itself. Isn't this what the sacrifice of Calvary was all about?

The gratuitous love of God for humankind is manifest from the earliest verses of the Bible. In Genesis, after having created man in his own image [1:27], "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" [1:31]. Mankind, then, is seen as inherently good, and therefore deserving of love from God on a gratuitous basis. This being the case, what does it say about our relationship with God? The Bible tells us that we should love God in response: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" [Deut. 6:5]. In other words, God is to be loved gratuitously, as He loves us. Rather than retributive, the relationship is reciprocal.

In the end, Job abandons his efforts to obtain retributive justice from God. Instead of pursuing his case, he repents of his previous complaints — justified though they may have been — and humbles himself before God [42:6]. At that point, he is fit to have his wealth restored [42:10], because his relationship with God is no longer dependent on considerations of self-interest.

In a way, I see my immigrant flock as being in the same position as the fallen Job, especially during the early years. Back then, they appeared to offer little to attract a pastor, and even less hope of acquiring their own church facility. They may have had good heads and hands, but they had limited material resources, and few credentials. You might say they had little going for them, considering the obstacles they faced with respect to the language and the laws of this country. Suffice it to say that my relationship with this congregation was of necessity a disinterested one, for there was little in the way of favorable prospects in sight for any of us at that time (1991).

In spite of the disadvantages confronting us, we have continued our efforts to develop programs that respond to specific needs of our church members as well as the wider community. Behind all of these activities, however, is the desire to give expression to a fundamental tenet of faith: Like Job, we have found that, in all times and all seasons, God is to be praised for his gratuitous love.

CHAPTER THREE

Toward a Theology of Urban Ministry for the Immigrant Church in the Context of Education

Introduction

For a practicing minister of the gospel like myself, the question of a personal theology of urban ministry raises many philosophical and professional issues. For example, it may appear at first that the Tabernáculo Evangelico, Assembly of God [A/G], in Revere, Mass., where I serve as pastor, represents the antithesis of urban ministry. Instead of remaining in the inner city, my church moved from East Boston out to a nearby suburb. Several years later we moved again, closer this time to the city, but still well beyond the inner core.

Earlier I raised the question, Did our move to the suburbs mean that we had abandoned the social concerns of our parishioners? On the contrary, I find that needs of this sort have no particular connection with the venue of the city. Jesus, when asked why he ate with publicans and sinners, spoke of their spiritual health: “They that are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” [Matt. 9:12]. I take this to mean that the church serves all who suffer, regardless of the social context. On the other hand, Jesus himself, though he preached and found refuge in the country outside Jerusalem, eventually fulfilled his ministry in the city.

Why is a theology of the city important? While numerous biblical verses affirm the theological significance of the city, modern writers offer additional insights. Robert C. Linthicum sees the city itself as God’s creation. He maintains that “God created the city even as he created the mountains and hills and trees and brooks.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God, City of Satan*, 32.

How, then, are we to think of the church's role in the life of the city? In this chapter, I propose to develop a theological basis for my approach to urban ministry, from the perspective of the immigrant church. I plan to discuss the dimensions of service to the community, on both the spiritual and social levels, in the context of the educational programs of the Tabernáculo Evangelico. In particular, I will consider the theological underpinnings of our home study groups [*grupos familiares*].

Toward a Theology of Education for the Immigrant Church

As a preacher of the gospel, I base my ministry on the Great Commission: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" [Mark 16:15]. For me, this command of Jesus to his disciples encapsulates my ministry first and foremost. Indeed, before he was taken up, Jesus reiterated this behest to his disciples one last time, enjoining them with the prophecy:

. . . You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. [Acts 1:8b]

Does this mean that Jesus perceived his ministers to be nothing more than peripatetic spokesmen for the faith, preaching the kingdom as they traveled about? No, because his vision was deeply rooted in a concept of community, which he encapsulated in the prophetic phrase, "Thy kingdom come" [Matt. 6:10a].

The term "Christians" was first used by Greeks to refer to the followers of Jesus in Antioch.⁵⁷ But the first Christian church referred to in the Bible was formed in Jerusalem

⁵⁷Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 25.

[Acts 2:47]. Christianity can therefore be seen as city-based, at least where its earliest roots are concerned. Does our faith still have an urban focus today? I believe it does, as I plan to show by using my own congregation as an illustrative example.

As a framework for the discussion, I will use the categories offered by Dr. Eldin Villafañe for describing a theology of urban ministry. The elements of this scheme include a theology of place, theology of peace, and theology of prayer. The notion of ‘practical theology’ will guide the analysis. As defined by James Fowler, practical theology is “theological reflection and construction arising out of and giving guidance to a community of faith in the praxis of its mission.”⁵⁸ I will thus seek to strike a balance between secular considerations and theological concerns.

Theology of Place

A theology of place recognizes that the church serves the needs of the locality where and as it is found. This concept applies not only to the physical location, but also to the social and cultural circumstances of the community.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, we acquired a building and moved the church from East Boston to Malden, two years after my arrival in 1991. At the time, I felt restricted in our ability to expand for growth in the future. Sooner or later I knew that we had to find another home. As a congregation, we prayed and fasted for several days, seeking direction from God before making our commitment.

What was the outcome of our move? It may appear strange that we moved out of East Boston, where there was a high concentration of Hispanics, to a suburban residential area of Malden, where few Hispanics then lived.

⁵⁸ James W. Fowler, “Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives” in *Practical Theology*, edited by Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 149.

By moving, did we lose our urban focus? Fortunately, no, although the decision was controversial for us at the time. Some members resisted the idea and we lost a few of our flock as a result. But eventually our losses were compensated by the fact that some families moved to nearby Everett, which had relatively few Hispanic immigrants living there at the time.

Our overriding consideration then was the need to acquire our own facility to serve additional worshippers. But the building we purchased had classroom space, thus giving us the ability to conduct literacy and language classes in the new building. This enabled us to initiate the educational programs that we continue to develop up to the present.

Why education? Aren't there schools set up for this purpose? On the contrary, I find abundant support for the values of education, rooted in both the Old and New Testaments.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS. Throughout the Old Testament, the clergy are depicted as a literate class. Moses, for example, receives the Ten Commandments, according to Jehovah, "which I have written for their instruction" [Ex. 24: 12]. Moreover, the order applies not to the clergy only, but to the entire people of Israel: "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" [Deut. 6: 9].

For the ancient Jewish people, universal literacy was clearly an indispensable part of their religion. The Bible, however, takes the matter a step further, when Moses declares: "Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it." [Deut. 6: 1]. Here, admission to the promised land is linked to a knowledge of the law, acquired through instruction.

The book of Proverbs contains numerous exhortations regarding the value of learning: for example, “Keep hold of instruction; do not let her go; guard her, for she is your life” [4: 13]. Here we find what may be the first advertisement for adult education: “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning” [9: 9]. Regarding the instruction of children, the advice is equally straightforward: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” [22: 6]. The last chapter of Proverbs, which concerns the role of women, contains the verse, “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” [31: 26].

The book of Psalms is likewise replete with references to wisdom and instruction. The psalmist repeatedly begs to be taught by God, and says of the man who is blessed, “. . . on his law [of God] he meditates day and night” [1: 2].

In the Old Testament, then, moral law and educational values are inextricably tied together. Beyond this, however, the New Testament adds a further dimension.

NEW TESTAMENT ROOTS. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” [Matt. 22: 39] were the words of Jesus Christ to the Pharisees. This commandment asserts the responsibility of the churches for the well-being of their members. Moreover, as if to eliminate any question about the meaning of “neighbor,” Jesus provided the parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10: 29-37], in which a neighbor is defined as anyone who is in need of help. From this viewpoint, the role of the church becomes a broad-based obligation to serve the needs, not only of parishioners, but of mankind in general.

In the four books of the Gospel, Jesus is frequently cast in the role of teacher. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is preceded by the words, “And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying . . .” [Matt. 5: 2]. On several occasions, Jesus is referred to as

rabbi, or teacher of the law. In one incident, “. . . and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority” [Matt. 1: 21b–22a].

The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of teaching in his advice to the early Christian church community: “Having gifts, . . . let us use them: . . . he who teaches, in his teaching” [Rom. 12: 7]. Paul clearly saw teachers as an indispensable part of the church: “And his [Jesus’] gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers . . .” [Ephes. 4: 11]. In this verse, it is worth noting that the first three roles of apostle, prophet and evangelist are enumerated separately, while those of pastor and teacher are syntactically combined, as if they were different aspects of the same function. Finally, in his second epistle to Timothy, Paul says, “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching . . .” [3: 16].

Having found ample support in the scriptures for educational values, we are confronted with the question, How shall we apply this legacy in urban ministry? And in particular, to whom? The early church faced the same dilemma, when the question of ministering to the Gentiles, as opposed to those who taught, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” [Acts 15: 1].

OUR SOCIAL CONTEXT. The community we serve extends laterally through the social structure, and reaches out beyond the confines of the nearby geographical area. We draw from a social space or niche, as it were, within the larger society. I find nothing unusual in this; most congregations seem to reflect a common set of characteristics drawn from a much broader social context. Experience suggests that people from comparable social strata who share parallel economic circumstances, as well as similar racial and cultural roots, plus common aspirations, tend to gravitate to the same church. This seems

natural, given that people want to feel comfortable in the place where they worship. But in my view it contains some inherent dangers. The church I serve provides examples of such cohesion, with challenging implications for our future.

THE HAZARDS OF CULTURAL ISOLATIONISM. To the adult members of my congregation, our church represents a cultural and religious refuge in the midst of a strange and sometimes hostile country. The church provides an opportunity for them to be themselves, and affirm their common values. Personally, I can understand this deep-seated spiritual and cultural need. Like most of my flock, I am an immigrant too, having come to the States from Puerto Rico in 1975, at the age of 25. For those among our membership who are illegal aliens, the threat of deportation inhibits contact with Americans in general. As a result our church tends to look inward to a degree that limits outreach to the local community.

My family confronted an example of this tendency toward self-isolation soon after we arrived in Boston. Some church members objected to the fact that my daughters used English during services. These congregants were afraid of cultural contamination, since the adults in particular speak Spanish as their first language. Their children, however, are growing up bilingual. As they progress through school, English becomes the dominant language for our younger members, and the generation gap continues to widen. Our Christian education programs and youth ministries are particularly affected.

As time goes on, we will have to develop ways to address the needs of our young people, some of whom are already teen-agers. Among other things, this means increased use of English during services. The subject is a delicate one, since we don't want to lose our appeal to the foreign-born Hispanic community either.

Theologically, our inward focus contravenes the spirit of the Christian message. Self-preoccupation creates a bias toward ethnocentrism. Is this isolationist tendency a product of city life, and should it therefore be accepted as inevitable by those who are engaged in urban ministry?

Harvey Cox reported on a failed experiment by some Protestant ministers who tried to encourage neighborly love among residents in a group of high-rise apartment buildings. To their dismay, the pastors found that their subjects “did not want to meet their neighbors socially and had no interest whatever in church or community groups.”⁵⁹

The problem, Cox pointed out, was a misplaced concept of *koinonia*. Urban anonymity is not necessarily opposed to *koinonia*. On the contrary, Cox says, it can be liberating, by freeing mankind from the tyranny of the law. The challenge, he adds, is “to develop a viable theology of anonymity.”⁶⁰

As an immigrant church, we don’t want to be so preoccupied with what goes on internally that we descend into cultural narcissism. We could easily forget that Jesus was not Hispanic; nor for that matter is it likely that he ever heard a word of English. A church in this condition may see itself as rightfully segregated from the broader society. For these Christians, Jesus is the ‘Christ against culture’ and their faith becomes ‘an exclusive loyalty to an exclusive Christ.’⁶¹ I fail to see how this outlook represents a path toward spiritual growth for us as a congregation, however.

The problem of cultural isolation strikes at our very identity as a church of Christ. Thus it seems appropriate to ask, Is our identity as an immigrant church consistent with biblical teaching?

⁵⁹ Cox, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 42

⁶¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p. 68 (New York: Harper & Row, 1951 [Rev. ed. 2001]).

Certainly in the Old Testament there are abundant examples of immigration. Many of these immigrants were essentially nomads with no specific destination in mind. Adam, for example, was an involuntary emigrant from the Garden of Eden, but also an immigrant to the unspecified land in which he settled, presumably to the east of Eden [Gen. 3:24]. Noah likewise was a wanderer, although by water instead of land. Abraham is perhaps the archetype among the immigrants of the Bible. Acting on a command from God, he and his family struck out for Canaan, although famine forced them to continue as far as Egypt. All of these biblical personages — including Moses and the children of the Exodus — were responding to a command of God. In my own experience, however, I have yet to encounter anyone who gave a call from God as his or her reason for emigrating to this country. Does this mean that the Bible has no message for immigrant churches?

Not surprisingly, I find my answer to this question in the New Testament. Jesus himself has a particular connection with immigrants. As Pastor John P. Rossing pointed out, “Jesus was a migrant.”⁶² He understood the immigrant experience of isolation and rejection. Jesus gave an eloquent expression of this situation: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head” [Luke 9:58].

It therefore seems natural for immigrant churches to coalesce along cultural lines, as a response to their culturally ambiguous position. But a look at the first Christian congregation described in the book of Acts reveals one overriding theme: unity. Amidst the diversity of languages and cultures, they were “of one heart and one soul . . . they

⁶² John P. Rossing, “*Mestizaje* and Marginality: A Hispanic American Theology,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (October, 1988), <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/oct1988/v45-3-article3.htm>.

had all things common” [Acts 4:32]. How was such unity achieved? Evidently it wasn’t through cultural solidarity. The Bible answers simply, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The manifestations of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost [Acts 2:2-12] represent the culmination of this unifying tendency.

At the Tabernáculo we have shared many intense moments of solidarity, as described in Acts. But how can we foster the spirit of unity on a more consistent and regular basis? In other words, how may we become the type of community [*koinonia*] that bears witness to the peace of God, both internally among ourselves and externally to those whom God may send our way? I believe that our cohesion depends on our collective ability to develop and practice a theology of peace, which I will consider next.

Theology of Peace

To emphasize its essential unity, St. Paul famously referred to the church as “the body of Christ,” (e.g.: “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” [Eph. 5:30]). The church, then, must pick up where Christ left off, when he finished his ministry on earth. At the point of farewell, he said to the disciples, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” [John 14:27]. Thus we know that peace was fundamental to his original mission.

How is this peace to be achieved? As Christians, we join together to promote the peace of Jesus Christ. To us, peace is the fruit of God’s justice and mercy, to which we bear witness in many ways, among them by responding to the Great Commission. Christians may see the Commission as specific to the New Testament, but *kerygma* itself has abundant antecedents in Old Testament scripture. “I will extol you, O Lord, among the nations,” sang the psalmist [18:49]. The O.T. prophets likewise viewed their role as

world-wide in scope. Isaiah saw himself as “a light for the Gentiles” [49:6], while Micah proclaimed, “Hear, you peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that is in it” [1:2].

Thus Jesus was following a well-established tradition when he dispatched his disciples to the ends of the earth. While modern churches have interpreted the Great Commission as a mandate to send missionaries to remote parts of the world, the immigrant church by contrast finds itself in the reverse situation. Instead of traveling to foreign parts, the immigrant church receives believers who are themselves aliens. A biblical precedent is found in the command of Moses: “Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” [Deut. 10:19]. Jeremiah too was especially concerned that we “oppress not the stranger” [7:7] and “do no violence to the stranger” [22:3].

How does the immigrant church go about fulfilling this O.T. behest? Dr. Eldin Villafañe advises urban churches to take a three-fold approach:

Shalom speaks of the mission of “today’s Church — a community of exiles and pilgrims.” Seeking the peace of the city means to seek (1) peace in the community (it is *Koinonia*), (2) peace (welfare) of others — compassion/concern for all people, but above all for the poor and the needy (it is *Diakonia*), (3) peace (wholeness and harmony) — it speaks about reconciliation among races and ethnic groups and above all reconciliation with God (it is *Kerygma*). It is preaching, “be ye reconciled to God.”⁶³

It is a strength of the church that all three aspects of its mission — *koinonia*, *diakonia* and *kerygma* — are mutually reinforcing; that is, they all converge toward unity, or community, so to speak. Education, I find, serves all three aspects of church’s mission.

⁶³Eldin Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, 53.

To give just one example from my experience with the Tabernáculo Evangelico, I shall describe our program of home study groups [*grupos familiares*], which has served us in various ways.

HOME STUDY GROUPS. As reported earlier, in 2001 I traveled to Guatemala with a few of my church leaders to investigate the possibilities offered by home study groups. Initially, I perceived the notion of small groups as a ground-breaking and even revolutionary approach to ministry. But comparing these groups with the home churches described in the New Testament, however, I see similarities and differences as well. Cell group members don't share their property in common, but they can be seen as micro-churches, not unlike the home churches described in the book of Acts:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, of the breaking of bread and the prayers [3:42].

Over the fourteen years that I have been with this congregation, the home group program has been the single most successful effort we have undertaken. The effect on our membership growth has been extraordinary. So far as I can see, the introduction of home study groups provides the only convincing explanation for the rapid growth in our church membership over the past five years [see table below].

Year	Membership
2000	75
2001	120
2002	180
2003	230
2004	547
2005	633

How are we to explain this unexpectedly high rate of growth? Is our church simply

occupying a demographic sweet spot that enables us to benefit from the wave of new Latino immigrants to this country, as well as the movement of immigrant residents who are leaving the inner city for the suburbs? Perhaps so, but I suspect that our growth is more than the result of a happy accident. The increase comes from a confluence of factors — home study groups among them.

To my mind, the value of cell groups comes from the powerful combination of theological principles listed by Dr. Villafañe in the prior citation. I reiterate them below with examples of home study group activities that reflect these three aspects of the church's mission:

- (1) *Koinonia* — fellowship, to include refreshments and socializing before and after meetings; networking within the group, for example to exchange job information; discussion of common concerns in the light of faith; visits to ailing group members.
- (2) *Diakonia* — service ministry, by the sharing of funds in emergency situations, such as a death in the family, or acute financial crisis.
- (3) *Kerygma* — spiritual guidance toward the solution of personal problems; prayerful support in dealing with circumstances that produce emotional stress, such as domestic abuse, loneliness, family conflict.

The synergy of these three elements, it seems to me, is greater than their usefulness considered separately, because each home study group is an extension of the Tabernáculo. These groups enable my professional ministry to expand far beyond my own physical limitations, to reach many more people than I could ever get to know directly.

The book of Exodus provides a practical example of the value of small groups within the church. Faced with pastoral overload, Moses goes to his father-in-law Jethro, seeking advice on how to cope with the demands made upon him by the members of his flock. Jethro advises Moses to put men in charge of the people as judges “of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens” who will decide in small matters for themselves. That way, Jethro assures Moses, “It will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you” [18: 21-22]. The soundness of this advice, as a way of preventing pastoral burnout, is unquestionable. But what value do small groups provide for the people?

Writer Julie A. Gorman offers a simple explanation for the attraction of small groups: “People long for a sense of connection to God and other people.”⁶⁴ This suggests to me that small groups answer two needs, one spiritual, the other social. The combination, if our membership growth at the Tabernáculo provides an indication, is a powerful one.

Theology of Prayer

Before Jeremiah exhorted his captive people to pray for the peace of Babylon [Jer. 29: 7b], a psalm of David called for Jews of an earlier generation to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” [Ps. 122:6 KJV]. Jerusalem was considered to be a sanctuary of Jehovah, whereas Jeremiah took a giant step by extending the application of prayer to other cities, even a hostile one like Babylon.

The Apostle Paul carried the concept to its ultimate limits: “Pray without ceasing” was the behest of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians [1 Thess. 5:17]. Why was prayer

⁶⁴Julie A. Gorman, “Small Groups in the Local Church,” in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, Michael J. Anthony, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 176.

so vital to Paul? Jesus provided the answer when he warned his disciples, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” [Mark 14:38]. By ‘temptation,’ I assume that Jesus meant anything that distracts a believer from his faith, or a church from its mission.

What has prayer got to do with education? By way of an answer, Dr. Eldin Villafañe offers the following observation:

Cualquiera sea la forma que adopte nuestra misión diaconal, cualquiera sea su estrategia social: servicio social, educación social, testimonio social o acción social, siempre debemos recordar que “la oración es la que le da carácter a nuestra acción.”⁶⁵

[Whatever form our mission of service may take, whatever its strategy may be: social service, social education, social testimony, or social action, we must always remember that “prayer is what gives true character to our action.”]

At the Tabernáculo, we could easily be diverted by concerns with church growth, or financial support, or simply the desire to please everybody in the organization. How, then, can we maintain a proper balance in the direction of our educational programs?

The problem is a complex one. In the legal climate of the U.S., where church and state are officially separated, educational activities would appear to be principally the domain of the government. Jesus himself appeared to endorse the separation of church and state. He summarized his relationship to the temporal power of his homeland with a masterpiece of diplomatic ambiguity: “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, and unto God that which is God’s” [Luke 20: 25]. Indeed, Pilate saw no threat from Jesus to the power of the Roman state [John 19: 38]. Nevertheless, Christians eventually found

⁶⁵Eldin Villafañe, *El Espíritu Liberador* 189; quotation from Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*, (New York: Seabury, 1979), 172.

themselves in conflict with the Roman emperors, and their pretensions to divinity. Like the Jews, they too lived by the commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” [Ex. 20: 3].

It is worthwhile to consider what Jesus would make of the situation in this country, so far as the relationship between church and state are concerned. In the Declaration of Independence, the founders of the American republic asserted that all men “are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” They went on to say that “to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

It seems to me curious that political rights, though God-given, are nevertheless to be guaranteed not by the church but by the state. Freedom of speech and religion, as guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, are also government sanctioned. What would Jesus have made of this? Would he have found it ironic that the motto “In God we trust” appears on our currency?

Suffice it to say that God has not disappeared entirely from our governmental institutions, although He may have been relegated to the background. Any church, however, is subject to diversion from its aims, and the pastor liable to fall prey to empire building.

In order to keep our congregation focused on its vision, we rely on a range of prayer activities:

1. Tuesday night prayer service, combined with Bible study. Led by the pastor or a church elder.

2. Early bird Sunday service [5–7 a.m.]. The pastor or assistant pastor leads a prayer session in an open format where individual concerns are addressed. Usually 5-10 attendees.
3. Monthly Vigils [Fri. 10 p.m. — Sat. 2 a.m.]. Conducted by different ministries from within the church: men's, women's, youth, missions, deacons, etc.
4. *Guerreros de Oración*. Prayer team of approximately 30 petitioners for the welfare of local communities, e.g. Revere, Chelsea, Lynn, Everett, Saugus, etc. On Saturday nights they gather at the church and split up into groups of three who go out to strategic locations [such as the city hall] in target communities where they engage in prayerful reflection on behalf of the town or city. Mostly young adults. This ministry evolved as a spin-off from the home study group program and encounter ministry.

ENCOUNTER MINISTRY. Following a period of dissension within our church in 2003, I recognized that we needed spiritual healing as a congregation, but I didn't quite know how to go about it. At the recommendation of one of our members, I contacted a Hispanic pastor in Rhode Island who specialized in conducting religious encounter sessions. We asked him to lead such a retreat for our congregation in February 2004. Fifty members of our church attended the weekend event in New Haven, CT, from which we came away renewed and reinvigorated, in the aftermath of the division that had sapped our strength during the previous year. In fact, we decided to develop our own encounter ministry, using the materials from the previous session. With four of our church officers, I traveled to Argentina to learn about this program from its originator, Rev. Dr. Claudio Freidzon.

Over the next several months I discussed the encounter concept with other A/G pastors in southern New England. With another church from Rhode Island, we held an encounter event in Maine, for which the theme was *Cara a Cara con Dios* [Face to

Face with God]; approximately one hundred people attended. Since the first event in September, 2004, we have conducted similar conferences jointly with other churches nine times. Attendance at these sessions averages about 250.

Jesus said to his disciples, when asked how he succeeded in curing an epileptic child, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” [Mark 9:29]. Encounter sessions, with their intense focus on particular issues, serve to raise the consciousness of attendees about what it means to have a relationship with God, as part of a church community. Although home study groups have brought us many new members, encounter sessions have raised the quality of support from current members, both in financial terms as well as spiritual commitment. As a tool for unifying the congregation, this form of spiritual practice has proved surprisingly effective.

One reason why our encounter sessions are so positive for the church is that we rely on prayer as a way of approaching problems that we address in conferences. In fact, I estimate that up to 25% of our time is taken up with prayer. Why? For several reasons.

First, prayer enables us to clarify the issue before us, by focusing our minds on the problem at hand. The act of prayer helps to orient us collectively in the same direction.

Second, by presenting our petition to God, we recognize that the solution to the difficulties we are facing must come from God alone — not from the pastor or anyone else in the congregation. We may pray for spiritual healing and reconciliation, forgiveness, understanding, consolation or the like, as the case may be.

Third, prayer serves as a psychological tool that helps us to deal with the issue that is being addressed in the conference — such as family relations, for example. Often our feelings about the problem impede our efforts to solve it. By articulating our shared pain through prayer, we experience a catharsis that serves to defuse the feelings of guilt,

anger or bitterness which may cloud the situation before us. The act of putting our emotions into words creates a degree of separation between ourselves and those feelings that can threaten to overwhelm us. By objectifying our concerns, we gain the perspective necessary to begin analyzing the subject at hand critically.

The value of prayer applies, of course, not simply to encounter sessions, but to all the various ministries of the church itself. In general, prayer serves to clarify our common vision as a congregation. Education, on the other hand, develops our abilities to implement that vision in the real world. Jethro, in his advice to his son-in-law Moses, defined the objective of educational programs as follows: “. . . and you shall teach them the statutes and decisions, and make them know the way in which they must walk, and what they must do” [Ex. 18: 20].

In my experience, I’ve found that many people are ready to help out in the church, provided that they have been taught what to do. Behind our educational efforts is the belief that people are a work in progress; in other words, we need to develop our skills in order to use them effectively in God’s service. If the laborers are few, it may be in part due to the fact that they don’t have the tools — that is, the knowledge and vision — to pursue our goals as a church community.

Lessons Learned

At the time we initiated educational programs at the Tabernáculo, I envisioned these efforts as helping our members to adjust to the characteristics of American culture. Later, I saw education as a way of fostering the spiritual development of my flock. But modern thinking in this area has taken the process a step further.

Lawrence O. Richards, among others, has described the purpose of Christian education in terms of *transformation*. “Christian education,” he asserts, “is concerned

about a process of personality and character transformation.”⁶⁶ Thus while educational activities serve to promote social justice, as well as economic progress, they also incorporate a much larger dimension. James W. Fowler, in discussing the work of analysts in the field of practical theology, pursued the same point:

Practical theologians see this discipline as concerned not just with . . . the mere formulation of persons for ‘adjusted’ living in society. Rather, they see practical theology . . . as intrinsically concerned toward personal and social *transformation*. [italics by author]⁶⁷

Jesus described this change as being ‘born again’ [John 3: 3], while the apostle Paul put it this way: “If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” [2 Cor. 5: 17].

The nexus with theological concerns leads to the kind of “transforming education” to which Eldin Villafañe has referred.⁶⁸ As Dr. Villafañe points out, education for urban ministry seeks to produce “agents of *transformation*.”⁶⁹ This notion applies, I find, not only to professional seminaries, which are the principal area of interest for Dr. Villafañe in this book. It is also relevant to local church programs like ours in the Tabernáculo. How so?

Lawrence O. Richards stresses the need for “a whole-person focus” in any approach to Christian education. That is, we must connect our educational programs to practical, real-life situations. He compares reality-based instruction to formal classroom learning that emphasizes theory over practice:

⁶⁶Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 25.

⁶⁷James W. Fowler, “Practical Theology and Theological Education: Some Models and Questions,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 42, No. 1, April 1985. <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1985/v42-1-article4.htm>.

⁶⁸Eldin Villafañe, *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 196.

⁶⁹Eldin Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City*, 84.

Formal education may be effective in dealing with symbols and concepts abstracted from life. But when change and development in the total personality are desired, non-formal education has all the advantages.⁷⁰

Jesus similarly used illustrations from everyday life to explain his concept of the kingdom to ordinary people. The gospels report that he distinguished himself in formal learning situations, by demonstrating skill at teaching in the temple. But he also addressed the physical needs of the people, as in the feeding of the 5,000.

Likewise at the Tabernáculo, we begin by focusing on specific needs of our members, but often end up serving the church organization as a whole and even the wider community outside. For example, as our congregation has grown, the need for additional church services through the week has increased. Through the Bible Institute and the Leadership Academy, we have been able to develop the talents of some church members to preach the gospel. At present we have a team of fifteen individuals who are capable of coordinating a church service without any intervention from me. The benefit accrues not only to our church, but also to other congregations where our members are occasionally invited as guest preachers.

The home study groups that we run serve to augment other educational programs. Our Spanish literacy classes, for example, are attended by individuals who learned about us through the study groups. Approximately fifty percent of the students, by my estimate, are not affiliated with any church.

The literacy program, for Spanish speakers with limited formal education, was organized by three of our members who worked with me to develop the curriculum.

⁷⁰ Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, 64.

Using materials we supply, the instructor serve some 40 students. Some classes are held in local homes, while others utilize classrooms at the church.

Thinking for Oneself as an Educational Tool

As I read more in the field, I found that our approach to learning at the Tabernáculo has parallels with principles of educational theory. The original ideas for our programs develop when we recognize a condition that poses a problem of some kind for our members. The situation is not unlike the approach to learning advocated by John Dewey, who maintained that students learn best when they become engaged in a process of problem solving. As described by Lois E. LeBar, “Dewey held that education was essentially problem solving, the continuous reconstruction of experience. . . . School should provide . . . a learning situation because it causes him to think.”⁷¹ That is, students acquire knowledge most effectively when they are confronted with the challenge of analyzing a set of conditions and devising ways to improve them.

Jesus likewise encouraged independent thinking, in a subtle way, when he advised, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” [Luke 20: 25]. Thus he left to the believer the problem of how to discriminate between the two. Again, he proved himself a champion of the individual against the organization, when he declared, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” [Mark 2: 27]. Finally, Jesus affirmed to his disciples, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” [John 8: 32]. Clearly Jesus was not referring to

⁷¹Lois E. LeBar, *Education That is Christian* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 46.

the accepted conventions of his time, the so-called “truth” of his day. Rather he was talking about something yet to be revealed, and subsequently understood using the powers of mind given to us by the Creator for our own emancipation. Thus Jesus espoused the unfettered use of our mental abilities to meet the challenges of life.

Conclusion

The same pragmatic approach to ministry taken by Jesus characterizes our educational programs at the Tabernáculo. To summarize the main features of our strategy:

- Address a practical need that is widely shared by members of the congregation. Eldin Villafañe describes this approach as “contextual,” that is, grounded in the social and cultural realities of the situation confronting the church membership.
- Remember that God produces the fruits of our efforts. This involves recognizing that the results we achieve can never be known with certainty ahead of time.
- Respect the role of serendipity. Although we must always act with purpose, at the same time we need to allow for the unexpected turn of events that can open up new possibilities.
- Be flexible. Consider all serious suggestions, regardless of how improbable of success they may appear to be.
- Take risks. Some of our programs have required a substantial monetary investment up front. For example, to develop the curriculum for our leadership academy, we found it necessary to send seven of our leaders to Buenos Aires, Argentina for a week of training.

In summary, we began our educational programs by addressing pragmatic needs of our members, such as for literacy and competence in English. Gradually, as we developed our capacities and confidence, we extended our efforts to reach the larger immigrant community. The benefits of community outreach for the Tabernáculo have been significant. The editors of *Acting Your Faith* note that “In addition to more diversity, renewed spirituality and enthusiasm, congregations also frequently grow numerically.”⁷² This has certainly been true in our case. But even more importantly, we are making progress toward spiritual maturity. Jesus paid respects to the practical side of ministry when he said, “Man shall not live by bread alone,” recognizing that indeed our fundamental needs must be addressed. But he quickly followed this with the caveat: “But by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” [Matt. 4: 4]. Likewise the scope of our programs is expanding to encompass the needs of our parishioners, as well as those from other churches, for theological training, for example through the Instituto Bíblico. In Chapter 5, I plan to outline some of our future objectives in this area.

⁷²Victor N. Claman, & David E. Butler, with Jessica A. Boyatt, *Acting Your Faith: Congregations Making a Difference* (Boston: Insights, 1994), 106.

CHAPTER FOUR

Project Design

Introduction

At the Last Supper, Jesus announced to the disciples the famous words, “This is my body which is given for you” [Luke 22: 19]. The apostle Paul referred to the metaphor of the body several times in his letters, but he developed it at greatest length in the first epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 12. His primary purpose was evidently to bring unity to the congregation at Corinth, which was torn by dissension. But at the same time he addressed several other challenges facing the church as it evolved in the first century A.D.

We recall that Jesus said to Peter, “Upon this rock I will build my church” [Matt. 16: 18]. The image of an inanimate rock may tend to obscure the fact that Peter was a living man, and the church itself was therefore a living entity. The concept of the church as a ‘body’ emphasizes the organic nature of every congregation, each with the potential for growth and decay. Living organisms of course need nourishment to survive, as well as the capacity to prevail against hostile circumstances. To Paul, the survival of the church depended on the ability of its members to align itself with the example of Jesus Christ, “who will sustain you to the end” [1 Cor 1: 8].

The notion of the church as a living body draws additional power from the way it addresses the fact of diversity within congregations. As the human body contains numerous specialized parts, likewise every congregation is made up of individuals with specific gifts. Yet every individual body is also a *gestalt* comprised of components that are integrated to form a unit having a distinctive character. The parallels between the body of Christ and contemporary systems thinking appear unmistakable.

The Body of Christ and the Fifth Discipline

Although Peter Senge presents systems thinking as a modern development, a comparison with the concept of the body of Christ shows that systems thinking is more like a rediscovery of principles that St. Paul enunciated centuries ago. For Paul saw the church as a complex of interrelated processes, driven by the Holy Spirit to seek its fulfillment in the vision of salvation through Jesus Christ. In *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, Senge and his co-authors use the term ‘system dynamics’ to indicate that organizations are always in transition.⁷³ How can organizations harness this dynamic potential in order to grow and thrive? Senge’s answer is based on the concept of “the learning organization.”

St. Paul voiced a parallel concept. In his letter to the Corinthians, he went to some length to describe the diversity of functional roles within the church body, then summarized his argument by noting that “there are many parts but one body” [1 Cor 12: 20]. Next he listed various service roles by priority of importance: apostles, prophets, teachers, etc. Finally he advised that we “earnestly seek the higher gifts” [1 Cor 12: 31a]. Thus he recognized the necessity to strive toward continual improvement.

In the previous chapter [p. 66], I cited the role of pastors and teachers, as described by St. Paul in the book of Ephesians. Why teachers? In order “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” [Eph. 4: 12], as he explained it. I take this to mean that the educational role of the church is fundamental to its mission.

In this chapter I will analyze the role that education plays in the ministry that I oversee at the Tabernáculo Evangelico. To learn what factors are most critical to

⁷³Peter M. Senge et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1994), 30.

the educational process, I undertook a survey of a group of congregants who serve in key positions at the church. My investigation will follow the three-phase cycle developed by Dr. Eldin Villafañe as a hermeneutical circle encompassing the processes of clarification, conceptualization and confrontation.

CLARIFICATION. In this phase, the responses by survey participants are tabulated for subsequent analysis.

CONCEPTUALIZATION. Next, the responses are categorized and configured as hexagon clusters.

CONFRONTATION. The relationships between the clusters are represented graphically in a causal loop diagram. Results of the analysis will be summarized in a reflection on the hexagoning process.

Education in the Immigrant Church

To learn how educational activities affect the life of the Tabernáculo, I posed a question about the role of education to a panel of survey respondents. The issue is elaborated in Spanish and English on page 88.

The question as posed was somewhat open-ended, so the respondents could discuss education in terms of the role it plays at a variety of levels — personal, moral, spiritual, etc. On the other hand, they might concern themselves with the relationship between educational programs and the church itself. In this way I hoped to elicit a greater range of responses than would have been obtained otherwise.

A total of 84 responses were obtained from a team comprised of church congregants; the team members included home study group leaders, Bible Institute teachers, youth ministry leaders, deacons, and church staff. A few participants held no organizational positions. Approximately 83% of the group members were immigrants, and 17% were born in this country.

Hexagon Process Questionnaire

Question. What role does education play in addressing the social and spiritual needs of first-generation immigrants?

In general, what value do educational programs provide in the church? There are two ways to approach this question. We could ask, how does education encourage growth toward Christian maturity at a personal level? For example, you might mention your own experiences, as far back as childhood, commenting on those things that may have contributed to your spiritual development.

On the other hand, you may want to consider the value of educational programs for the church as a whole. Remembering that every congregation represents “the body of Christ,” how does education support the mission of the church?

If you have any ideas concerning improvements in educational programs in church, they would be appreciated.

Pregunta: ¿Qué papel desempeña la educación para atender a las necesidades sociales y espirituales del inmigrante de primera generación?

¿Por lo general, cuál es el valor de programas de educación en la iglesia? Hay dos maneras posibles de considerar la cuestión. Se puede preguntar, Es decir, cómo la educación amotiva el crecimiento hacia la madurez cristiana? Por ejemplo, Vd. puede mencionar su experiencia desde la niñez, comentando sobre lo que ha contribuido a su desarrollo espiritual.

Si tienen, se le pide sus ideas encuaneto a cambios para mejorar el trabajo educativo de nuestra comunidad.

To tabulate and categorize the data, I worked with the church secretary and an American friend who is active in a U.C.C. Congregational church. The results are shown in the table on pages 90–92. Possible hexagon clusters appear in the tables on pages 93–97. A causal loop diagram showing relationships between the clusters appears on page 98.

Initial Analysis

A total of 84 responses from the survey participants were tabulated. These results led to several inferences being drawn:

- The concerns expressed by the participants are wide-ranging and diffuse.
- The participants are focused on their home countries. Their attitudes and outlook reflect their origins rather than their future prospects.
- Their responses reveal an intense preoccupation with religious doctrine.
- They appear to be more preoccupied with conflicts within their own culture than with integration into their new host culture.

In general, it seems that the immigrant respondents have yet to make significant progress toward cultural transition. Their attitude toward education is apparently favorable, but they don't appear to recognize its significance as a means for achieving political influence and social equity.

It may be no exaggeration to suggest that immigrants feel threatened at a subliminal level by the larger social context in which they find themselves. Their cultural identity, to their way of thinking, is in constant jeopardy. As a result, their opinions about education are frequently ambivalent. This may account for the unfocused, ambiguous character of the responses obtained from the participants.

Tabulation of Responses to Hexagon Process Questionnaire

What role does education play in addressing the social and spiritual needs of first-generation immigrants?

1. The role of teacher applies at all levels of the church, whether to youths, adult males, adult females, or children.	2. Education shows us how to be more mature as Christians.
3. A curriculum should explain how the assembly needs to be educated.	4. We need to be educated in order to teach others.
5. Each teacher needs to create a syllabus describing the work the child is going to be doing in the class; that way the parent can get involved in the learning process of his or her child.	6. Policy on education should be applied with consistency, if teachers are to be trained effectively.
7. All the teachers should attend the Bible Institute.	8. If we encourage the young ones they will want to continue with their studies in the future [Proverbs 22:6].
9. Find more teachers for the level of educational needs that we have in church.	10. Teach the people doctrine, so they may understand what they are learning.
11. Education is needed to bring the self-esteem of youth that come from other countries up.	12. A problem for youth is that most of them speak English, and the non-English-speaking one feels left out.
13. We need more people who are willing to teach English.	14. People need to be willing to learn English.
15. We have more men than women at classes.	16. In many cases, parents don't support educational goals for their children.
17. We need to recognize that education is a sacrifice for the entire family.	18. The church needs to maintain a portfolio containing information about programs for newly arrived immigrants.
19. Teach people how to read and write.	20. Women need to stop thinking that they were born to stay at home and take care of their children and husband for the rest of their lives.
21. Immigrants have limited time.	22. People with abilities say they aren't being given opportunities to use them.
23. We need to stop making fun of people who are just learning how to speak English.	24. Help adults age 30 and up to continue with their studies.
25. People should allow themselves to be educated.	26. Male chauvinism must end.
27. Our Hispanic culture teaches that women should be at home all the time.	28. Differences in personal character traits present a serious problem.
29. Our egoism discourages people who want to be educated.	30. There's a lot of myths about educated people.
31. We need to encourage people.	32. We need to hold a conference about the benefits that education brings.

(cont.)

33. The good thing about immigrants is that they are very social-minded.	34. We have too many children.
35. The majority of the immigrants come with a poor education.	36. We come from rural places.
37. We take the hardest jobs in the U.S.	38. We get discouraged by what we hear others say.
39. If we get educated, we can grow in knowledge, following the example of Jesus (Luke 2:52): “And Jesus grew in knowledge and stature, and in favor with God and man.”	40. Daniel 1:4 (“youths without blemish, handsome and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to serve in the king’s palace, and to teach them the letters and the language of the Chaldeans”).
41. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 (“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, . . . that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”)	42. The apostle Paul exhorted Timothy, saying, “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).
43. Many people avoid studying the scripture, because they base their beliefs on particular verses.	44. Ecclesiastes 12:12 (Many immigrants base their attitudes about education on this verse which says, “and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”)
45. An educated church is more favorably recognized by the community.	46. A church without education is doomed to fail.
47. As Christians we need to fill ourselves with knowledge of past church history in order to grow more.	48. Education is important to the immigrant: learning English, the positive inputs of America history, and also how to live in this country with Christian values.
49. It’s easy to be a fool without education. (Prov. 13:16): “In everything a prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool flaunts his folly.”	50. Education is at the heart of Christianity.
51. Without education life can be confusing.	52. Without education we as Christians we don’t have a base.
53. When someone is educated as a Christian, it is easy to work with them.	54. Working in the church is part of the process of education.
55. Education can enable you to help someone else and learn the differences between cultures and understand where they came from.	56. As the church, we should make sure that new members are taught the fundamental values of the Bible, church, and Christianity.
57. Having the Holy Spirit goes hand in hand with education because it makes you mature as a Christian on a personal level.	58. Someone with education is capable of teaching the word of God.
59. When I was a kid, the church rules were different than now. I had to learn for myself through education what my values were as a Christian.	60. When I was a youth in my country, all the youth use to get together and learn from each other.
61. My goal when I was younger was to memorize the word of God, not only listening to the word.	62. Back in the days in my country, we were taught how to live a right life as Christians.

(cont.)

63. Attract more people to church.	64. Helps bring the community together.
65. Develops better leadership, internal or external, in the church.	66. Education can help immigrants to integrate with the host culture.
67. Education can help people understand each other's culture so as to have a better relationship with each other.	68. Through education, we can achieve the degree of spiritual maturity that will enable us to teach others the genuine Christian faith.
69. Provide a better education for the second generation.	70. Provides values that will instruct our children.
71. It helps us understand the Word of God in many ecological aspects.	72. Education is a motivator for good values.
73. We need to enhance understanding of other people's cultures; that way we can educate them without offending them.	74. We need to get educated to be able to understand others.
75. If we educate the assembly, we can have better leaders.	76. Education gives us a tool to assimilate.
77. Being educated, we can educate others that are just adjusting to this country.	78. An educated church is an orientated church.
79. Education helps us to understand others morally and spiritually.	80. Education helps us to better understand the scriptures.
81. Fewer high school students will drop out.	82. Through education, we eliminate unfounded beliefs and myths.
83. Helps to undo the effects of both male chauvinism and feminism.	84. We need to include parents in the education of their children.

Hexagon Clusters

What role does education play in addressing the social and spiritual needs of first-generation immigrants?

Beneficial Effects of Educational Programs in the Tabernáculo Evangelico

A. Leads toward spiritual maturity at a personal level

2. Education shows us how to be more mature as Christians.
39. If we get educated, we can grow in knowledge, following the example of Jesus (Luke 2:52): “And Jesus grew in knowledge and stature, and in favor with God and man.”
47. As Christians we need to fill ourselves with knowledge of past church history in order to grow more.
50. Education is at the heart of Christianity.
52. Without education we as Christians we don’t have a base.
57. Having the Holy Spirit goes hand in hand with education because it makes you mature as a Christian on a personal level.
59. When I was a kid, the church rules were different than now. I had to learn for myself through education what my values were as a Christian.
61. My goal when I was younger was to memorize the word of God, not only listening to the word.
62. Back in the days in my country, we were taught how to live a right life as Christians.
68. Through education, we can achieve the degree of spiritual maturity that will enable us to teach others the genuine Christian faith.
71. It helps us understand the Word of God in many ecological aspects.
72. Education is a motivator for good values.
78. An educated church is an orientated church.
80. Education helps us to better understand the scriptures.

B. Imparts spiritual values to others

4. We need to be educated in order to teach others.
8. If we encourage the young ones, they will want to continue with their studies in the future [Prov. 22:6].
10. Teach the people doctrine, so they may understand what they are learning.
41. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 (“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, . . . that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”).
42. The apostle Paul exhorted Timothy, saying, “What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).
56. As the church, we should make sure that new members are taught the fundamental values of the Bible, church, and Christianity.
58. Someone with education is capable of teaching the word of God.
68. Through education, we can achieve the degree of spiritual maturity that will enable us to teach others the genuine Christian faith.
70. Provides values that will instruct our children.

(cont.)

<p>C. Fosters church growth</p> <hr/> <p>46. A church without education is doomed to fail. 63. Attract more people to church. 64. Helps bring the community together.</p>
<p>D. Encourages development of individual mental abilities</p> <hr/> <p>19. Teach people how to read and write. 24. Help adults age 30 and up to continue with their studies. 48. Education is important to the immigrant: learning English, the positive inputs of America history, and also how to live in this country with Christian values. 49. It's easy to be a fool without education: (Prov. 13:16) "In everything a prudent man acts with knowledge, but a fool flaunts his folly." 69. Provide a better education for the second generation.</p>
<p>E. Increases interpersonal understanding between diverse cultural groups</p> <hr/> <p>55. Education can enable you to help someone else and learn the differences between cultures and understand where they came from. 67. Education can help people understand each other's culture so as to have a better relationship with each other. 73. We need to enhance understanding of other people's cultures; that way we can educate them without offending them.</p>
<p>F. Socio-cultural factors favorable to educational success</p> <hr/> <p>33. The good thing about immigrants is that they are very social-minded. 45. An educated church is more favorably recognized by the community. 54. Working in the church is part of the process of education.</p>
<p>G. Enhances personal relationships</p> <hr/> <p>53. When someone is educated as a Christian, it is easy to work with them. 60. When I was a youth in my country, all the youth use to get together and learn from each other. 74. We need to get educated to be able to understand others. 79. Education helps us to understand others morally and spiritually.</p>

(cont.)

H. Improves quality of church leadership

- 65. Develops better leadership in the church, and in general outside.
- 75. If we educate the assembly, we can have better leaders.

I. Facilitates adjustment to host culture

- 40. Daniel 1:4 (“youths without blemish, handsome and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to serve in the king’s palace, and to teach them the letters : the language of the Chaldeans”).
- 66. Education can help immigrants to integrate with the host culture.
- 76. Education gives us a tool to assimilate.
- 77. Being educated, we can educate others that are just adjusting to this country.

J. Helps overcome misperceptions and erroneous beliefs

- 51. Without education, life can be confusing.
- 82. Through education, we eliminate unfounded notions and myths.
- 83. Helps to undo the effects of both male chauvinism and feminism.

Negative Factors Affecting Implementation of Educational Programs

K. Problem of sexism

- 15. We have more men than women at classes.
- 20. Women need to stop thinking that they were born to stay at home and take care of their children and husbands for the rest of their lives.
- 26. Male chauvinism must end.
- 27. Our Hispanic culture teaches that women should be at home all the time.

L. Functional challenges to be addressed by church

- 1. The role of teacher applies at all levels of the church, whether to youths, adult males, adult females, or children.
- 3. A curriculum should explain how the assembly needs to be educated.
- 5. Each teacher needs to create a syllabus describing the work the child is going to be doing in the class; that way the parent can get involved in the learning process of his or her child.
- 6. Policy on education should be applied with consistency, if teachers are to be trained effectively.
- 7. All the teachers should attend the Bible Institute.
- 18. The church needs to maintain a portfolio containing information about programs for newly arrived immigrants.
- 22. People with abilities say they aren't being given opportunities to use them.
- 32. We need to hold a conference about the benefits that education brings.

M. Negative attitudes and prejudices concerning education

- 14. People need to be willing to learn English.
- 16. In many cases, parents don't support educational goals for their children.
- 25. People should allow themselves to be educated.
- 29. Our egoism discourages people who want to be educated.
- 30. There's a lot of myths about educated people.
- 43. Many people avoid studying the scripture, because they base their beliefs on particular verses.
- 44. Ecclesiastes 12:12 (Many immigrants base their attitudes about education on this verse which says, "and much study is a weariness of the flesh.").
- 84. We need to include parents in the education of their children.

(cont.)

N. Limitations of personnel and resources

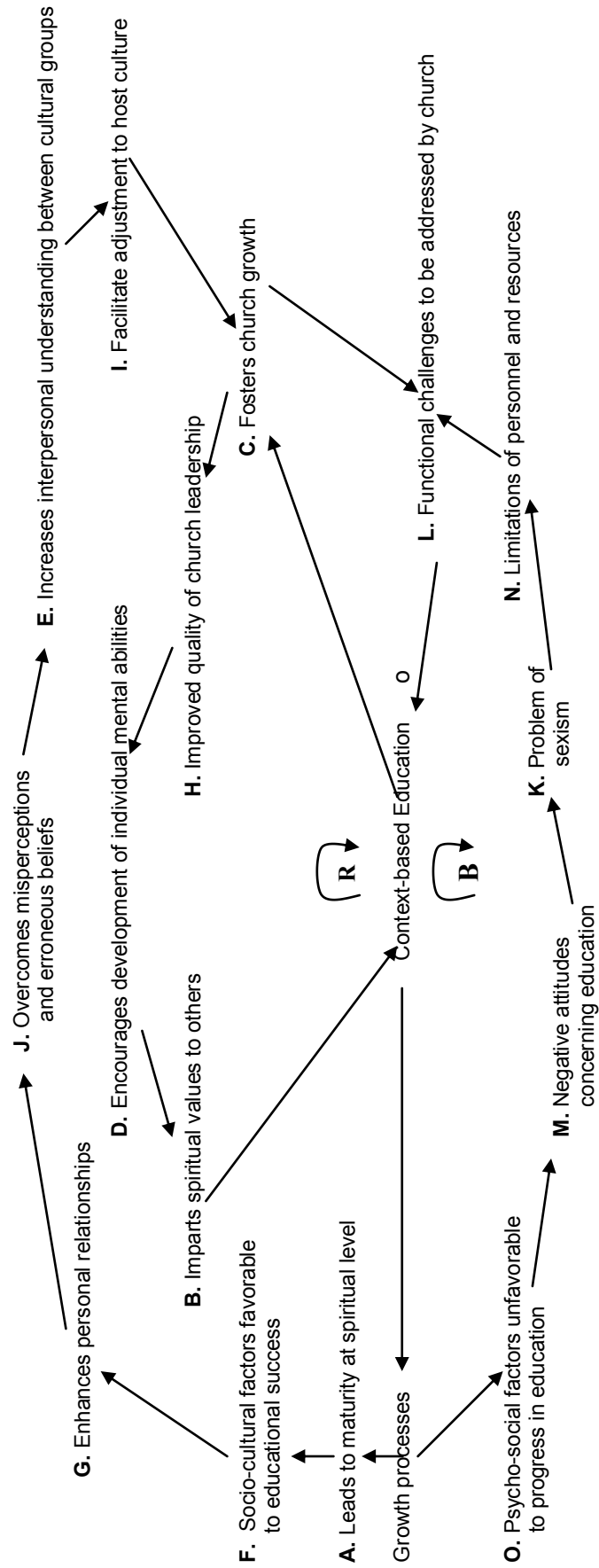
- 9. Find more teachers for the level of educational needs that we have in church.
- 13. We need more people who are willing to teach English.
- 21. Immigrants have limited time.
- 37. We take the hardest jobs in the U.S.

O. Psycho-social factors unfavorable to progress in education

- 11. Education is needed to bring the self-esteem of youth that come from other countries up.
- 12. A problem for youth is that most of them speak English, and the non-English-speaking one feels left out.
- 17. We need to recognize that education is a sacrifice for the entire family.
- 23. We need to stop making fun of people who are just learning how to speak English.
- 28. Differences in personal character traits present a serious problem.
- 31. We need to encourage people.
- 34. We have too many children.
- 35. The majority of the immigrants come with a poor education.
- 36. We come from rural places.
- 38. We get discouraged by what we hear others say.

Causal Loop Diagram

What role does education play in addressing the social and spiritual needs of first-generation immigrants?



The systemic relationships shown in the causal loop diagram indicate that education can serve as a tool to help the church grow both physically and spiritually. The notion of a growth dynamic is consistent with the organic concept of the church as the living body of Christ.

On the other hand, a disposition that sees education as a danger to cultural identity can have serious consequences for the church itself. For education is significant not only for the individual members, but also for the church organization to which they belong. If the members are themselves engaged in a cultural transition, so likewise must be the church itself. Theologically, the church is under a mandate to “be fishers of men,” without regard to their cultural origin or background. The Great Commission, with its global outreach, impels the church to integrate itself into the wider community.

In order to get a more comprehensive idea of how church-based educational programs work in practice, I interviewed the pastors of three Hispanic evangelical churches with different cultural perspectives. The interviews are summarized below, with resulting conclusions. Complete transcripts of the interviews are contained in Appendix 4 [p. 140].

The persons interviewed were selected in order to obtain a broad spectrum of viewpoints.

Pastoral Interviews

INTERVIEW #1: THE TRADITIONAL MODEL. The first was the pastor of a small fundamentalist Pentecostal church [A/G] in central Connecticut. As a condition of the interview, the name and location of the church have been withheld.

The church membership is overwhelmingly foreign-born, from Puerto Rico, and therefore legally citizens. Culturally, however, the church is essentially an immigrant congregation. Services are conducted entirely in Spanish.

When asked to describe his church, the pastor referred to his congregation as an “iglesia de oración” [prayer-based church] whose mission is “dar a entender el evangelio” [to proclaim the gospel]. The church maintains no social programs or community outreach efforts, although the pastor mentioned that a doctor at a local hospital occasionally asks them to pray for patients who are at or near death. On three occasions, according to the pastor, patients who had been pronounced dead were resuscitated subsequent to their prayerful efforts.

The principal educational tool is the traditional “Escuela Dominical,” the adult Bible study program conducted on Sundays. The situation leads me to ask, Is there a connection between the limited education offerings in this church and the fact that the congregation remains small? Variants of this question continued to come up in subsequent pastoral interviews.

INTERVIEW # 2: A MIXED IMMIGRANT CHURCH. This church could be described as a congregation in transition. About one half of the membership are immigrants. Services offered to immigrants include referrals to social programs, E.S.L. classes, and updates on immigration law. Services are conducted in Spanish, except for one English-language service a week, usually on Sunday, conducted by the youth minister.

The pastor described his church as “economically strong,” with no outstanding debt. In addition to their own facility, the church owns four houses in the surrounding area, which it leases to tenants.

This church is a daughter congregation to the Iglesia Cristiana Juan 3:16 in the Bronx, NY, founded by Rev. Ricardo Tañón. One of his parishioners, Rev. Ramón Figueroa, founded the Norwalk church in 1954.⁷⁴ The fact that the church is long established, and

⁷⁴ Samuel Diaz, *Historia de la Iglesia Pentecostal, South Norwalk, Connecticut*, (Self-published, 1994), 9.

located in a more densely urbanized area than the congregation in the previous interview, might account for the significantly larger membership [325 vs. 70]. But there could be other factors to consider, such as the characteristics of the ministry, which may be more important. With this in mind, I continue to the next pastoral interview.

INTERVIEW # 3: A CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL CHURCH. Unlike the previous two, this church is non-denominational, and independent of any sponsoring organization. More significant, however, is the manner in which the church has utilized education as a tool for community outreach. Working with the Emmanuel Gospel Center [EGC] in Boston, the church has established itself as a Higher Education Resource Center [HERC]. The program provides recent high school graduates with guidance in evaluating college opportunities and applying for scholarships.

The HERC program is entirely non-religious in nature and open to the community at large. Nevertheless, HERC has contributed significantly to church growth, in the opinion of the pastor, Rev. Nelson Gonzales. His principal concern, from the outset, was for the local youth. “Young people were hanging out in the neighborhood and getting into trouble,” he noted. Thus, social conditions were the motivating factor in this case, rather than spiritual needs, although the two clearly overlap in some respects.

Although he never used the word *shalom* directly, Rev. Gonzales has aligned his ministry with the mandate of the prophet Jeremiah, in seeking the peace of the city, which in this case is Lawrence, MA. His advice to me and other pastors, during the interview, was, “Pastors should reach out to the community, seeking opportunities to do God’s work.”

Reflection on the Hexagon Process

Viewed collectively, what do the responses in the questionnaires tell us about the church, and the people who comprise it? Perhaps the most impressive aspect is the extremely diverse array of responses. Evidently the term “education” means a variety of things to different people. No single approach — whether a program activity or a technique of organization — holds the key to a successful educational strategy.

Does the diversity of responses from participants mean that there is no unity in the church? On the contrary, unity of vision lies at the center, as seen in the causal loop diagram. St. Paul repeatedly refers to the church as “the body of Christ” while at the same time recognizing the diversity of the members, e.g.: “For the body is not one member but many” [1 Cor 12: 14]. Elsewhere he expressed the need for a common vision by simply declaring: “There is one body and one spirit” [Ephes. 4: 4a]. Martin Luther King expressed it with the words “I have a dream.”

What does this concept of unity within diversity imply about the growth of the church? To me, it seems that the church must evolve or die, and we as pastors must be ready to respond to the changing dynamics of the society around us. How might such adjustments be achieved? I believe that education plays a critical role in this area.

From the causal loop diagram, it is clear that education begins with the pastor. As the spiritual leader of the church, the pastor establishes the climate in which values and goals are set, and toward which the congregation can be guided. This notion is reflected in item **A** of the causal loop diagram. The pastor’s efforts in turn are affected by social and cultural factors that may help or hinder the educational process (**F**; **O**). This complex of attitudes is reflected in the profile of the churches where interviews were conducted, as previously described.

The first interview [p. 99], revealed a church that was strictly focused on its spiritual mission. With respect to the broader society, this congregation could be described as culturally isolated. Educational activities are confined to adult Bible study on Sundays [*Escuela Dominical*]. Community outreach takes the form of occasional evangelizing in the local Hispanic community.

The “mixed immigrant church” [Interview # 2] spreads a wider net, socially speaking, but takes a limited approach with regard to activist issues. The third interview showed a congregation with an aggressive educational strategy, in particular where young people are concerned. This church visualizes education as a tool for fulfilling its social as well as spiritual mission. Overall, the differences in outlook among the three churches confirms the results of the hexagon analysis, which suggests that the influence of the pastor is critical in determining the path to be followed by the congregation.

In the Tabernáculo Evangelico, I find that I must promote my agenda before church leaders specializing in the area of education, for example, the Christian Education Dept., the Board of Deacons, and leaders of home study groups. Together, we undertake efforts to develop programs designed to improve the quality of church leadership.

Many of the recommendations as well as the complaints listed by the respondents to the survey are rooted in problems related to a lack of education. The ability to perform effectively in ministry doesn’t always come naturally. It requires an investment by the church in the training of its members extending over many years. Conversely, the lack of effective church programs can also be traced to inadequate knowledge and experience. These problems can likewise be addressed through a continuing educational effort.

Jesus observed to his disciples that “the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few” [Luke 10:2]. Why do we find such an imbalance between workers and the harvest?

Is it because, as Jesus said in another connection, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”? [Matt. 26: 41]. If so, then there is little hope that willing hands can be brought to the task of ministry.

What appears to be a lack of motivation, however, may be remedied by giving those hands the tools, figuratively speaking, to do the job. This, at least, is the premise behind the educational programs that we have undertaken at the Tabernáculo Evangelico. The role of the pastor in this area, I think, is to make demands on his flock in a positive fashion, to encourage them to develop their God-given talents in a planned way, that is, through education.

In general, I find that Hispanic immigrant churches fail to recognize that educational programs offer them an opportunity to express their commitment to the community in a more practical way. Moreover, by demonstrating respect for the value of education, through program commitments, the church sends a powerful message to its younger members.

Moreover, the church already has many of the tools necessary to initiate educational programs of various kinds. The availability of church buildings for classroom use, during the week, is a major asset. The talents of church members, which are often available on a voluntary basis, can be put to use. The attitude of the pastor toward the development of educational programs, is another important factor.

In my pastoral experience, I have found that churches which avoid developmental programs tend to have a distinctive set of characteristics. Those churches which embrace education, on the other hand, exhibit a different group of traits. Each orientation may have profound effects on the outcomes for any given congregation. For this reason, I will analyze these differences in Chapter 5.

PART III: CONFRONTATION

CHAPTER FIVE

Outcomes and Conclusion

Reaching Out

When I first arrived as the newly elected pastor of the Iglesia Monte Carmelo in East Boston [the predecessor of the Tabernáculo Evangelico], my vision for this church included, among other things, the following:

- Develop a program of outreach to the local community.
- Create a missions department or activity, whether foreign and/or domestic.

When I expressed my vision to church members, however, I met considerable resistance. I was even accused of being somewhat dictatorial. I then realized I had to think more deeply about the question and ask, What kind of community does God want us to be? Eventually I concluded that I was caught in a matrix that involved two clashing perspectives, which could be described broadly as the traditional role versus the non-traditional role of the church.

In general, the traditional religious perspective manifests itself in a preoccupation with theology and doctrine. In Spanish, we describe such churches as *legalista* [legalist] or *fundamentalista* [fundamentalist]. Perhaps more than anything else, the emphasis in these churches is placed on strict literal interpretation of the Bible.

The non-traditional Hispanic church, on the other hand, tends to interpret biblical scripture more flexibly than its traditional counterpart. Non-traditional churches leave greater latitude for individual conscience and taste. In practice, any given church will exhibit characteristics of both types. The table on the next two pages shows some of the areas of contrast between the traditional and non-traditional perspective.

Two Church Models:		Traditional Model	Non-Traditional Model
Biblical interpretation		Literal interpretation of scripture	Understanding of the Bible not only from a literal but also a cultural and historical perspective is acceptable.
Secular education		Academic learning is of little value to the Christian believer. The Bible is the only legitimate source of knowledge.	Education has intrinsic value and should be appreciated as a tool for advancing the work of the church in the community at large.
Politics		Politics, at whatever level, is a worldly activity and should be avoided, although parishioners may vote.	As an agent of God’s justice, the church may advocate political participation without compromising its values.
Community service		Service to the local community is minimal.	The church provides services to all members of the community, to the extent that resources permit.
Fasting		Fasting is an essential tool for maintaining spiritual health.	Fasting is important, but other options are available both within and outside the church.
Pastoral counselling		The pastor is the only appropriate advisor to members in personal matters (marriage, children, financial difficulties, etc.).	In addition to the pastor, other professional practitioners may be consulted (Christian psycho-therapists, clergy from outside the congregation, or specialists in particular fields such as financial planning, etc.).
Prophecy		God speaks to all believers, and anyone may prophesy during services.	Prophecy is respected, but subject to thoughtful analysis in the light of Biblical teaching.
Healing		Healing of sickness occurs by means of divine will, invoked through fasting and prayer.	Scientific medical cures can be sought without denying the healing power of faith.
Prayer		Prayer is the solution to any type of problem.	Prayer has a role to play in solving problems, but we also need to apply practical judgment to the situation at hand.
Special religious ceremonies (marriages, funerals, presentation of children to the church)		Special ceremonies are performed only for members of the congregation, with rare exceptions.	Pastors may perform special ceremonies for non-members.

Ecumenical practices	Combined services, and other formal contacts, are permitted only with other traditional Pentecostal congregations.	Joint services and fellowship with other Christian denominations are acceptable.
Outreach to the local community	Community outreach takes the form of canvassing, distributing tracts or street preaching.	In addition to evangelization, the church offers social services as part of the outreach effort.
Recreational sports	Participation in team sports is unacceptable. Watching athletic events should be curtailed, or at least infrequent.	Members may engage in team sports and belong to athletic leagues. Within the church itself, members may form teams and participate in competition with the local teams from outside the church.
Entertainment	Believers should avoid television (except for TV news and weather), movies, dancing, popular music, etc. No visits to parks or beaches (except for purposes of baptism or outdoor services). Sex as a subject for discussion is taboo.	Conventional forms of entertainment are accepted, within limits of good taste.
Sexual matters		Pastor may educate the congregation either from the pulpit or by class instruction, about Christian sexual practices and beliefs.
Divorce	Marriage is a lifetime commitment, and divorce is not considered an option. Pastors may not perform marriage ceremonies involving divorced persons.	Each case of marital discord needs to be handled individually. Pastors provide compassionate support regardless of the decision made by married couple.
Remarriage	Remarried persons may become members of the congregation, but may not serve as deacons or co-pastors.	Remarried individuals can serve the church in any leadership role. In certain cases, divorced and/or re-married persons can be ordained as clergy.
Personal appearance and dress for women	Women should avoid makeup, jewelry or hair styling.	Women can decide for themselves, in a Christian spirit, about dress and hair.

Why Education?

Among Hispanic churches in general, secular education is not widely accepted. In the more traditional churches, secular education is seen to be useful as training to qualify for a trade or to acquire practical skills to earn a living. Beyond this, however, education for its own sake is considered an illusion. Traditional Hispanic believers ask, “Porqué tanto estudio? Jesús viene mañana. Todo se quedará con el anticristo” [Why study so much? Jesus comes tomorrow. The Antichrist will get everything else.].

Fundamentalist Hispanics make a distinction between secular and religious education. The latter type is respected as having value, at least through the three years of Bible institute training. After that, the Bible is considered the only book worth reading, a credo that applies to pastors and parishioners alike.

This attitude concerning education prevails among most of the churches in the northern New England section of the Assemblies of God, for which I serve as director of Christian education. About twenty churches are included in this area. Before considering how the traditional outlook might be changed, it seems appropriate to ask, Why should it be changed? The answer, I find, has to do with the very purposes of the church itself, and in particular with the mission of the immigrant churches like those in my district.

In the course of my pastoral career, I’ve found that churches flourish when they address the needs of the people they serve. The question legitimately arises, Do immigrants, in their capacity as church members, need secular education? More fundamentally, Should the church become an advocate for secular education?

In the current debate over fair treatment for undocumented immigrants, the question of social justice has come to the fore. Many Hispanics believe that justice for immigrants

requires a politics of confrontation. But in the long run, it seems to me, education lights the path to social justice. How is justice to be achieved? Through education, which involves cultural assimilation. Rallies and demonstrations may have their uses, but these efforts won't in themselves facilitate integration into American society.

Education and Religion

The apostle Paul requested of his assistant Timothy, "So when you come, . . . bring me my books" [2 Tim. 4:13]. Elsewhere Paul declared that "the letter kills," but he also recognized that scholarly works serve to illuminate complex questions, such as the connection between education and the fruits of *shalom*.

Religious educator Gabriel Moran sees an inseparable link between religion and education. For Moran, education and religion exist in a state of tension. As Moran put it:

Abstractly defined, religion and education collide. But placed in relation to the idea of development, the educational and the religious achieve a working relationship. Education needs a religious impulse or else its concern to put things in order closes off further development and thereby undoes the meaning of education. Religion needs educational restraint and challenge so that its impulse to transcend the world does not lose touch with the world to be transcended.⁷⁵

Thus in practice, education and religion complement one another. Robert W. Pazmiño put it simply: "Education at its best must be God-centered."⁷⁶

An early proponent of the link between education and religion was John Wesley. Harold W. Burgess cites the example of Methodists who dedicated themselves to educating the poor and working classes of 19th century England, during the first decades of the Industrial Revolution:

⁷⁵ Gabriel Moran, *Religious Educational Development: Images for the Future* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1983), 184.

⁷⁶ Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 31.

For Wesley, education was not secondary to evangelism, it was bound together with it. Wesley was convinced that the results of Methodist revivalism could be made permanent only as new members could be properly educated.⁷⁷

At the same time, Burgess notes, Wesley recognized wider needs: “Accomplishing his broad vision required addressing the need for basic education including the essentials of hygiene and medicine.”⁷⁸ Likewise in the Tabernáculo, we include topics on AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, drug addiction and alcoholism in our curriculum for youth, and presented by some of our members who work in the medical field.

Education and Social Justice

From the above it becomes clear that the term *secular education*, perceived as a worldly activity, is a misnomer. Education cannot be separated from religious ethics and values, as Moran recognizes. Traditionalists among the Pentecostals I serve fear that education can somehow be divorced from the spiritual. Indeed, there are many in the educational establishment who would like to perpetuate this notion. A graphic example was the strenuous effort by scholars in the field of black studies to explain the demise of the Peoples Temple, without reference to the Bible. But I found all the explanation I needed when I learned that Jim Jones set himself up before his followers as “the returned Christ to bring Socialism”⁷⁹.

It seems ironic that Jim Jones, even as a false prophet, cloaked himself in the role of a promoter of social justice. Robert W. Pazmiño points out that “the prophets were the social educators of their times who called the people, the leaders and the nations to

⁷⁷Harold W. Burgess, *Models of Religious Education* (Wheaton, IN: Victor Books/SP Publications), 58.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Rebecca Moore, et al., eds., *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, 112.

account for their ways”⁸⁰. From this he concludes, “The prophetic tradition suggests the need for Christian educators to grapple with the social, political, and economic implications of faith commitments”⁸¹ Thus he finds that education needs to be contextualized, that is, applied to the conditions of the actual society where it occurs.

Under this imperative, the link between the church, as advocate for social justice, and the aims of education, is established. Pazmiño cautions educators against the extremes of falling into a “dead orthodoxy,” which emphasizes religious doctrine at the expense of social realities, and excessive preoccupation with liberation theology to the point that the Bible is thrust aside.

Education: A Hard Sell

The mandate for the immigrant church thus becomes clear: To promote the value of education as a tool for social justice. Without education, no credible voice can be articulated from within the culture. Why then are so many Hispanic Pentecostals dubious, if not hostile, toward secular education? A possible explanation appears in an article by Luther E. Smith, who described CME churches as places where “places where persons were welcomed and embraced into fellowships of caring.”⁸² For immigrants from Latin America, as for blacks migrating to cities within the U.S., the church has provided an ambience in which they have “affirmed their worth as people of God.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Robert W. Pazmiño. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 32.

⁸¹ Ibid., 33.

⁸² Clifford J. Green, ed., *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States 1945 - 1985* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 55.

⁸³ Ibid., 58.

The hazards of such cohesion, however, include isolation from the society outside the church. I'm not surprised to find such a limited perspective reflected in attitudes toward education. Fundamentalist Hispanics make a distinction between secular and religious education. The latter type is respected as having value, at least through the three years of Bible institute training. After that, the Bible is considered the only book worth reading, a credo that applies to pastors and parishioners alike. As an example of this attitude, I recall a pastoral candidate at an A/G Bible study institute in Connecticut, where I taught more than twenty years ago. This student was functionally illiterate, and therefore could only take examinations orally. He was subsequently ordained and is now the pastor of a small traditionally oriented Hispanic church in Bristol, CT. Over the years, he has become more literate, but this has not affected the outlook for his congregation.

The opposition to secular education that I've encountered may have deeper causes, however, beyond merely resistance to cultural assimilation. To explain, I will draw from my own pastoral experience, vis-à-vis the Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME).

INSTITUTO BÍBLICO. About eight years ago, one of the deacons who taught the Escuela Dominical [Bible study] each Sunday before church, suddenly quit without prior notice. The reason he gave was expressed to me as a metaphor: "Las mangas de mi camisa son muy grandes para la iglesia. Y las mangas de la iglesia son muy cortas para mí" [My shirtsleeves are too long for the church, and the church's sleeves are too short for me.]. Ostensibly this means that he and the church were incompatible. However, this was his way of saying that his educational attainments were beyond the ability of the church members to appreciate.

Since we had no one qualified to step in and take his place, I found myself obliged to take over his teaching duties on the spot. More importantly, however, this situation showed me that I needed to increase my store of biblical and professional knowledge. Almost immediately, I began taking graduate-level courses at CUME in Jamaica Plain.

Shortly thereafter, three deacons and another church member enrolled at CUME. However, they all discontinued their studies after one course. Does this mean that the former instructor was right after all? Not necessarily, but it shows that careful preparation is needed for such study. Thus education is clearly a process that requires effort over time.

Significantly, the church members soon began to see me in a more favorable light, to the point that they began to fund most of my tuition costs. At the same time, our educational programs at the church gained a new impetus. We started a program to train instructors for the Escuela Dominical, and, with approval from the congregation, I applied to the Spanish Eastern District, A/G, for authorization to set up an Instituto Bíblico at the church.

There were already several A/G Bible institutes in the Boston area, but this branch was adapted especially for the needs of immigrant students. Other institutes essentially opened only on week nights, but our school operates exclusively on Saturdays, when most students are off from work. The students normally pay tuition themselves. For Tabernáculo members, however, scholarships are available on a case-by-case basis.

Bible Institutes are designed to qualify graduates for certification as A/G ministers. However, undocumented immigrants are ineligible to be certified, because of employment restrictions under current law. Nevertheless, 70 to 80 percent of our students, by my estimate, are undocumented; the reason they enroll is to serve as teachers in home study groups, fill board positions, and assume positions in our various ministries.

The advantage to the Tabernáculo is considerable, but the larger community also benefits because approximately one third of the students are sent to us by other churches and denominations in the surrounding area.

In this connection, the pastor of an independent congregation near the Tabernáculo refused permission for a group of church leaders to attend the Instituto Bíblico. When asked why they couldn't enroll, I was told they disagreed with our form of church doctrine. The problem, however, appears to have other aspects.

INSECURITY OF CHURCH PASTORS. Professor Dennis Williams has cited a continuing situation in which “many senior pastors and ministry leaders prefer to do the work of ministry themselves, and feel threatened by the presence and abilities of volunteer leaders.”⁸⁴ On several occasions, new members have come to my church who told me that in their previous churches, “No me dan la oportunidad para crecer” [I'm not given a chance to grow.]. This problem frequently goes unacknowledged, but if it is to be addressed at all, I suspect it will be resolved through some form of education.

Education: A Tool for Cultural Embrace

Education serves many purposes, but in the case of immigrants, education facilitates adjustment to American culture. The biblical book of Ruth provides a study in cross-cultural relationships. The story raises questions about where we belong, and on what terms. It begins with a Jewish family emigrating from Judah to another country, Moab, for economic reasons [famine]. Apparently the Moabites readily received the newcomers,

⁸⁴Dennis Williams, “Recruiting, Training and Motivating Volunteers,” in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, Michael J. Anthony, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 168.

notwithstanding the harsh times; Naomi and her family are treated humanely. This fact sets the tone of equanimity and goodwill that pervades the entire story.

Eventually Naomi returns home, accompanied by her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, who voluntarily adopts the Jewish religion and culture of her mother-in-law. In Judah she meets Boaz, whose behavior exemplifies the obligations of the host culture to assist the immigrant who is struggling to survive and adapt to an unaccustomed milieu.

Setting aside their cultural and religious differences, Boaz treats the Moabitess as if she were his Jewish kinswoman, by virtue of her marriage to Naomi's son. The biblical message here suggests that the host culture should be aggressive about helping immigrants overcome the obstacles to cultural adjustment. It appears to indicate that foreigners should be welcomed and accommodated. Most significantly, however, the cultural embrace in the book of Ruth is *mutual*; the Moabites accept Naomi and her family of Jewish strangers, and later the Jews embrace Ruth as one of their own. The implications for the church are clear.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH. Among recent immigrants, especially those from Central America, transition to American culture is not high on their personal agenda. For them, the connection to the U.S. exists primarily through their work permit. Faced with this challenge, what are some of the means by which the church can assist with cultural transition? One of the most powerful tools is education. Nevertheless, why should the church get involved in education? After all, isn't our primary role to preach the gospel?

Education serves many purposes, but in the case of immigrants, education opens the way for adjustment to American customs and culture. Not the least among the norms of

life in the U.S. is competency in the English language. This fact was brought home to me by a situation we had that involved a family belonging to the Tabernáculo.

One day at church the father of a child in the Sunday school came to me and said that he was considering the possibility of withdrawing his family from membership in the church. He said that his son had complained about the fact that he couldn't understand what was going on in the class, which was taught in Spanish. He told me that the church was not meeting the spiritual needs of the family. I was concerned about this because the father was a Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary student and a good friend.

The next Sunday, after church, I went with the entire board of deacons to the home of my friend. With all of the family present, we discussed the whole range of areas where the church was failing to meet their needs. The father told me that he sensed a cultural barrier between his family, who is Puerto Rican, and the rest of the church, which is mainly Central American. As Puerto Ricans, he said, they are used to attending bi-lingual churches. He went so far as to say that his family was not readily accepted among the congregation, and used the term "raicista" [racist] to describe the climate of the church, as they had experienced it. In the Sunday school, his son said that the teacher insisted that English not be used.

On the way back to the church afterwards, one deacon said that we should make some language reforms. Because our children are growing up bi-lingual, I agreed with him. Clearly some changes had to be made.

Thus within our church there are differences emerging along generational as well as cultural lines. Some of our youth are asking for bi-lingual services, while the adults are resisting this trend.

The style of music is also an issue. The young people want a more modern and popular type of gospel music, with keyboard instruments and electronic sound. The adults prefer more traditional hymns with guitar accompaniment, to which they were accustomed in Latin America. Our current solution is to offer separate youth services in English and Spanish, with music styled to their taste.

A Strategy for Christian Education

What strategy should we use to promote the value of education in our churches? A first step, according to Donald B. Rogers, is to take an objective look at the church's situation as it exists. Only after such analysis can a set of theoretical principles be developed on which to base a practical approach. As Rogers notes, "The factors of the actual situations prompt reflection on the process of education and give birth to the principles of theory."⁸⁵ The need for unbiased assessment is a continuing one, for it provides the best assurance that the needs of the congregation will be addressed.

In my position as an education director for the A/G, I see myself as a bridge between the local churches in my section and the macro-organization at the district level [*Distrito Hispano del Este* (Spanish Eastern District)], as well as the General Council of the A/G in Springfield, MO. My program thus far has four points, as follows:

- Provide a standard curriculum for the Sunday school [*Escuela Dominical*] in the local churches. This applies to adults in Bible study as well as children. For the most part, we use instructional materials supplied by the A/G General Council.
- Encourage pastors to pursue higher education. At sectional meetings and through individual contact, I make them aware of opportunities available. Their efforts will set an example to convince their flocks, especially the young people, of the necessity to prepare themselves for leadership positions in American society.

⁸⁵ Donald B. Rogers. "From Setting to Theory: Principles of Urban Church Education," in *Urban Church Education*, Donald B. Rogers, ed., (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989), 13.

- Conduct conferences and information sessions with pastors and church leaders, at which graduates and faculty members from institutions of higher learning can make the case for continuing education.
- Annually host a section-wide “convention” to focus on educational challenges and objectives. The first one, in Woburn, attracted 25 people from the local churches; the second, at the Tabernáculo, drew 45; last year, we had about 200. Now I have a team from different churches to make visits, distribute instructional materials, and hold meetings to foster a common vision with respect to education.

As mentioned earlier, this effort is the work of many years. It will take considerable time to overcome resistance to secular education in our churches. Slowly, however, we are opening up channels of communication and the local churches are beginning to respond to our efforts. As we expand our religious educational programs, we stand to increase the literacy level of our members, and gain credibility for education as a tool for urban ministry. By educating ourselves in our faith, we improve our ability to convey it to others whom God may send our way.

Implications of Findings

Analysis of results from this study provides several fundamental concepts for consideration by church educators.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT. A colleague from Lowell, Mass., in a written comment to me, observed, “In a church where the majority of members are immigrants, the educational process would be tremendously helpful in moving forward the work of the church.”⁸⁶

Implicit in this remark is the concept that education programs derive from concrete needs. In the case of immigrants, such needs are acute and multifarious. The pastor is usually in a better position than the newly arrived immigrant to respond to those needs.

⁸⁶ Cecilio Hernandez, pastor of the Iglesia Ebenezer, A/G, Lowell, MA, e-mail communication, 12/22/06.

SYSTEMIC INTERACTION. The relationship between the purposes of the church and the goals of education is a systemic one. Both overlap, for example, in the areas of social and economic justice. In practice, the church uses the tools of education to inculcate spiritual principles, while institutions of learning seek to develop the ability to think critically about complex issues. Thus both religion and education are interconnected at multiple levels.

CHURCH IN TRANSITION. Unlike indigenous churches, the immigrant church is in a state of cultural transition. Not only are church members in the process of assimilating the ambient culture, but their children are growing up immersed in the same alien milieu. Under these conditions, pastors are challenged in several ways. They must assist their parishioners to gain perspective on their current situation, and prepare the church for the coming second generation.

PASTOR IS KEY. The pastor is custodian of the educational vision. It seems fair to say that, without aggressive pastoral support, educational programs are unlikely to go forward. At the Tabernáculo, my role in this effort has been to lead by example. Although I didn't realize it at the time, the act of enrolling in an institution of higher learning enhanced my influence as an advocate for education within our congregation.

URBAN MINISTRY EDUCATION. Professional education for pastors needs to reflect the requirements of immigrant ministry. As Eldin Villafañe framed the question: "Does the [urban] curriculum serve the multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural and increasingly multilingual reality of our cities?"⁸⁷ Education for urban ministry must help clarify the role of pastors serving our growing foreign-born population.

⁸⁷ Eldin Villafañe et al., *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry*, 195.

EDUCATION AN INVESTMENT. Like any investment, education requires forward thinking, and involves risk. Purchase of materials, training of instructors, and administration all consume time and financial resources, with no guarantee of positive results. As Ecclesiastes put it, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days” [11:1]. Thus we may have faith in a favorable outcome, but until then, we must live with uncertainty.

Suggestions for Further Research

Possible areas for additional investigation concerning immigrant churches include:

- The effect of educational programs on church growth. Church growth is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but nothing precludes analysis of the process in order to discover optimum means to help it to flourish.
- Transition to American culture. Investigate ways to facilitate cultural assimilation. For example, immigrant churches need up-to-date information on social services available from government and charitable agencies that deal with problems such as domestic violence, abuse of workers on the job, legal status, etc.
- Techniques for management of church programs to optimize the transition to 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants, especially bi-lingual services and Sunday school classes for young adults and children.
- Dealing with deportation. The full range of effects on individuals, families, pastors and congregations should be covered. The moral and ethical dilemma for pastors forced to choose between their spiritual calling and their obligations under the law would be considered.

Executive Summary of the Thesis Project

The rapid growth of the Hispanic immigrant population in this country presents challenges and opportunities for the churches that undertake evangelical ministry to them in a complex urban setting. One of the most critical needs of immigrants from Latin America is for education. The role of education, however, as a tool used by churches for addressing the social and spiritual needs of these first-generation immigrants, is a subject of controversy. The current project views the issue through the prism of a case study of a Pentecostal congregation comprised mainly of Spanish-speaking immigrants from Central America.

Arguments exist for and against churches getting involved in secular educational activities. For the purposes of this study, the issue has been approached within the framework of Villafañe's *hermeneutical circle paradigm* of social ethics, which proposes a three-stage format. In the clarification phase of the analysis, [Introduction and Chapter One], the various challenges typically faced by Hispanics are discussed, with emphasis on the need for education. Racial prejudice, economic privation, and the language barrier are among the most prominent obstacles.

Using recent census figures and historical data, I assemble a demographic picture of the socio-economic situation vis-à-vis Hispanic immigrants, including projections showing dramatic growth of the Hispanic cohort over the upcoming half of this century. The analysis then focuses on my own church, the Tabernáculo Evangelico in Revere, MA. A comprehensive profile of the church is presented, together with details of our educational programs. Some tentative conclusions about the issue of education in churches are offered, in the light of Senge's concept of the learning organization.

In the conceptualization phase [Chapters Two, Three and Four], the question of an educational role for churches is pursued in depth. To assure a balanced perspective, in Chapter Two a diverse array of references used as resources in this study are surveyed, to include works on theology [e.g., Niebuhr], social action [Gornik], and organizational dynamics [Senge]. Insights derived from these sources, combined with my own biblical understanding, as well as personal experience at the Tabernáculo Evangelico, serve as a first step in developing a theological base for educational programs in first-generation immigrant churches.

Among the concepts emerging from the reflections in Chapter Two are the following:

- The church is a learning organization. It flourishes to the extent that it can bring the skills and abilities of its members to fruition.
- Small groups are a tool for enhancing church growth, as witnessed by the role of home study groups at the Tabernáculo. Likewise in another context, the late congressman from Massachusetts, Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, affirmed that “All politics is local.”
- Urban ministry thrives by addressing the needs of church members. The Bible calls on churches to help their immigrant parishioners as they cope with economic, political and social problems on a daily basis. “Man does not live by bread alone,” as Jesus noted, but this doesn’t exempt the church from practical ministry.
- Churches need to be forward about seeking ways to address the needs of congregants. As Jesus from the cross begged forgiveness for his enemies — conspicuously unasked [Luke 23: 34a] — so pastors must assume the initiative and embrace the risks associated with program development.

In Chapter Three, the above elements are combined to formulate a personal theology of the city. The discussion focuses on three areas, pursuant to a scheme suggested by Villafañe: a theology of place, of peace and of prayer.

A theology of place recognizes that the church serves the needs of the locality where and as it is found. Urban ministry thus applies to the social context of the community as well as the physical location where it is practiced. Immigrant congregations, however, are vulnerable to becoming isolated from the larger society, as members become preoccupied with affirming their own cultural values and concerns. At the Tabernáculo, this tendency strikes at our very identity as a church of Christ.

How, then, can we become the type of community [*koinonia*] that bears witness to the peace of God? A theology of peace derives from the Old Testament concept of *shalom*, or “welfare” [RSV]. Urban ministry finds affirmation in the behest, “Seek the peace of the city” [Jer. 29: 7a; KJV]. Our home study groups at the Tabernáculo, which I saw originally as a tool for evangelization, nevertheless address the educational and social needs of immigrants as well, by serving them as an information network.

A theology of prayer has its genesis in the Old Testament. Before Jeremiah exhorted his captive people to pray for the peace of Babylon [Jer. 29: 7b], a psalm of David called for Jews of an earlier generation to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” [Ps. 122:6 KJV]. In the Tabernáculo, we find that prayer keeps us focused on our mission and helps us solve problems and make decisions as a congregation. It is especially effective, for example, in our encounter ministry, where we concentrate on a particular issue, such as family relations or youth concerns. These sessions provide significant educational opportunities both for individuals and for the church as a whole.

Chapter Four contains the results of a survey designed to reveal how educational activities affect the life of the Tabernáculo. A representative group of congregants were asked to describe how they think educational programs contribute to the church, both at the individual level and collectively. Their responses showed that their attitude toward education is generally favorable, but their understanding of its value is somewhat vague and diffuse. For example, they don't appear to recognize its significance as a means for achieving political influence and social equity.

Interviews with three pastors of Hispanic churches in southern New England were conducted in order to learn how church-based educational programs work in practice. The results suggest a wide range of attitudes about education, but a broad generalization can be made. Churches that avoid developmental programs tend to have a distinct set of characteristics, which is described in Chapter Five as a traditionalist orientation [*legalista*]. Churches that embrace education, on the other hand, exhibit a different group of traits, which is identified simply as a non-traditional perspective [*progresista*].

Traditionalist churches tend to base their position against education on the assumption that secular programs are antithetical to the aims of the church. However, insofar as education serves to promote the values of political justice and social equity, shares goals in common with the mission of the church.

Regardless of orientation or philosophy, the immigrant church is always in transition. Demographics compel the church to prepare for the next generation of North Americans. The question before the church is whether to embrace the reality of cultural assimilation, or insulate itself against it. Education, however, can facilitate this transition, and provide a bridge to *shalom*.

Goals and Objectives for the Tabernáculo

Behind our educational efforts is the belief that people are a work in progress; in other words, we need to develop our skills in order to use them effectively in God's service. That being said, I will conclude by summarizing my goals as the pastor of an immigrant church in a mixed urban/suburban setting. Listed below and on the next page, these objectives cover several areas:

1. **BROADEN OUR CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE.** As an immigrant church, we tend to focus on our Hispanic roots and traditions. This tendency discourages outreach and, I feel, works against our purposes as Christians. My hope and vision for our church is that one day it will be open to everyone without regard to cultural background.
2. **IMMIGRATION MINISTRY.** Early on, I assisted immigrant members who were applying for visas, helped them to complete forms in connection with work and residency permits, and coordinated with attorneys and paralegals handling cases of people with proceedings before the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Over the years, we've developed a corps of people who work on these matters, and nowadays my work in this area mostly involves directing this ministry. We conduct weekend citizenship classes for those who already have obtained U.S. residency, to help them prepare for the requisite examination. Approximately 25 students are currently enrolled. Whenever I can, I encourage parishioners to apply for citizenship, stressing that it is the most effective way to acquire a political voice in this country.
3. **CONTINUE TO UPDATE OUR SECULAR EDUCATION PROGRAMS.** When I first arrived, the educational level of our congregation was equivalent to the fourth or fifth grade, by my estimate, back in 1991. To address the situation, we began offering literacy classes in Spanish, as well as E.S.L. training. Another effort involved the tutoring of immigrant students, usually of high school age, by adult volunteers from the congregation. In response to requests, we also developed a G.E.D. program, using materials supplied by the Commonwealth. I believe it is essential that we continue to improve this effort.
4. **INCREASE THE SCOPE OF OUR SOCIAL SERVICE EFFORTS.** At present our social services include a jobs referral network for members working as day laborers; a support group for single mothers who are victims of domestic abuse; and we have recently established a food bank for homeless individuals and local families. In

the future I want us to use our church vans during the week to deliver food from Boston food banks to distribution points in the Revere area.

5. GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL ADVOCACY/ACTION. A further development of our ministry for immigrants is to join forces with other advocacy groups to make sure that just legislation is passed in Congress. Also to advocate for justice issues impacting the life of immigrants.
6. ENHANCE OUR MISSIONS PROGRAM, BOTH GLOBAL AND DOMESTIC. In the past five years, our missions program has expanded significantly. Working through church members with ties to Central America, we support the planting of new churches there, either by paying the rent or funding construction as necessary, and providing a salary to the pastor. This year we sponsored the opening of a third church in El Salvador; we support two others in Guatemala. At the same time, we are providing similar support to a small congregation in Fitchburg, MA with the ambitious name of ‘Ciudad de Dios’ — yet another example of God’s politics of the city. My hope is not merely to expand the missions effort, but to diversify and improve it to foster the growth of our own congregation in Revere toward spiritual maturity.

If the church is one body, as St. Paul maintained [Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 4:4], then it must be a living organism capable of growth and maturation. As pastor, my role is to encourage the growth of the Tabernáculo Evangelico, not simply by increasing the membership, but by fostering the development of our God-given talents. Such efforts frequently involve financial risk, but I have found them to be essential for realizing the fruit of the Spirit, that is, *shalom*.

Recommended Guidelines for Pastors

Although the pastor will likely spearhead the educational effort of the immigrant church, there are some practices to embrace and others to avoid.

PROGRAMS REQUIRE INVESTMENT. Educational programs involve a degree of risk. Pastors should apprise the congregation of the possibility of failure.

AVOID EXHORTATION. Don't use the pulpit to push your pastoral vision. The appearance of force may generate resistance. Recognize that vision is developed through education.

YIELD TO RESISTANCE. Be prepared to put programs on hold. If the undertaking founders, wait for a more favorable time. Put time to work for you, or as we say in Spanish, "El tiempo es el mejor testigo" [Time is the best witness.].

TEST THE WATERS. Talk about your ideas with church members privately before voicing them publicly.

LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE. Take the cultural background of members into account, for example by traveling to their native countries as a mission/training project.

OUTSIDE TRAINING. As a matter of policy, never pursue outside instruction alone. Bring along other key people from the congregation.

EDUCATION TAKES TIME. Although we have implemented both secular and religious education programs at my own church, it took many years to get where we are today. In the routine of church life, it is easy to forget that education is a temporal process. The word *education* itself comes from the Latin "edu-care," meaning to lead or draw out. Thus instant or short-term benefits may not be realistically possible.

Appendix 1

Population Data

Nationality of Church Membership*
Tabernáculo Evangelico

NATIONAL ORIGIN	NUMBER	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Central America	—	—
El Salvador	179	28.3
Guatemala	151	23.9
Honduras	45	7.1
Nicaragua	13	2.1
Others	6	0.9
Subtotal	394	62.3
Caribbean	—	—
Puerto Rico	14	2.2
Dominican Republic	3	0.5
Others	2	0.3
Subtotal	19	3.0
South America	—	—
Colombia	95	15.0
Peru	18	2.8
Others	29	4.6
Subtotal	142	22.4
Mexico	14	2.2
United States	64	10.1
Grand Total	633	100.0

*As of August 2006.

Hispanic Population of Surrounding Communities

Tabernáculo Evangelico*

	Cambridge		Chelsea		East Boston		Everett		Lynn		Malden		Revere		Salem		Saugus		Winthrop	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cent. Amer.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
El Salvador	567	10.9	2711	19.0	3981	37.0	888	35.2	269	2.1	178	10.4	440	14.3	18	0.5	5	2.7	9	2.6
Guatemala	129	2.3	1777	12.4	567	5.3	127	5.0	1442	11.5	62	3.6	27	0.9	15	0.5	13	7.1	13	3.7
Honduras	66	1.2	1582	11.1	261	2.4	90	3.6	104	0.8	25	1.5	93	3.0	24	0.7	1	0.05	3	0.9
Nicaragua	39	0.6	68	0.04	31	2.8	10	0.4	15	0.2	3	0.2	7	0.2	87	2.6	0	0	—	—
Others	127	2.2	472	3.3	245	2.3	86	3.4	151	1.2	60	3.5	186	6.0	19	0.6	5	2.7	11	3.1
Subtotal	928	163	6610	46.3	5085	47.3	1201	47.6	1981	15.7	329	19.2	753	24.4	163	4.9	24	13.1	36	10.3
Caribbean	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Puerto Rico	1637	24.0	5363	37.4	1403	13.1	542	21.5	3769	30.0	486	28.3	802	26.0	759	22.6	52	28.4	110	31.3
Dom. Rep.	424	7.5	533	3.7	477	4.4	79	3.1	5517	43.8	65	3.8	127	4.1	2176	64.9	14	7.7	15	4.3
Others	270	4.8	227	1.6	66	0.6	50	2.0	148	1.2	83	4.8	74	2.4	44	1.3	19	10.4	24	6.9
Subtotal	2331	41.0	6123	42.9	1946	18.1	671	26.6	9434	75.0	634	37.0	1003	32.5	2979	88.8	85	46.5	144	41.0
So. Amer.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Colombia	378	6.7	658	4.6	2115	19.7	290	11.5	144	1.1	285	16.5	622	20.2	12	0.4	10	5.5	44	12.5
Peru	163	2.9	112	0.07	320	3.0	81	3.2	71	0.6	82	4.8	75	2.4	11	0.3	5	2.7	10	2.9
Others	710	12.5	117	0.08	212	2.0	92	3.7	101	0.8	213	12.4	160	5.2	58	1.7	11	6.0	51	14.5
Subtotal	1251	22.0	887	6.2	2647	24.6	463	18.4	316	2.5	580	33.8	857	27.8	81	2.4	26	14.2	105	29.9
Mexico	1175	20.7	660	4.6	1075	10.0	186	7.4	853	6.8	172	10.0	473	15.3	131	3.9	48	26.2	66	18.8
Grand Total	5685	100.0	14280	100.0	10753	100.0	2521	100.0	12584	100.0	1715	100.0	3086	100.0	3354	100.0	183	100.0	351	100.0

*Data from federal census of 2000.

**Nationality of Local Hispanic Population
in Surrounding Communities
Tabernáculo Evangelico**

NATIONAL ORIGIN	NUMBER	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Central America	—	—
El Salvador	9066	16.6
Guatemala	4172	7.6
Honduras	2249	4.1
Nicaragua	260	0.05
Others	1362	2.5
Subtotal	17109	31.0
Caribbean	—	—
Puerto Rico	14923	27.4
Dominican Republic	9427	17.4
Others	1105	2.0
Subtotal	25355	46.8
South America	—	—
Colombia	4598	8.4
Peru	930	1.8
Others	1725	3.2
Subtotal	7213	13.3
Mexico	4839	8.9
Grand Total	54512	100.0

*Based on federal census data as of 2000.

Appendix 2

History of the Tabernáculo Evangelico

History of the Tabernáculo Evangelico

BEGINNINGS. The church was founded in 1987 as a home-based congregation in Cambridge, with only 10 members. Sponsored as a missionary effort by the Iglesia del Buen Pastor [Church of the Good Shepherd, Assemblies of God] in Dorchester, the group was initially led by a woman named Rosario Zabalas. At some point in that first year, Rosario announced that she had seen the biblical Mount Carmel in a vision, and persuaded the group to adopt the name 'Iglesia Monte Carmelo.'

By the following year, the membership of the Mount Carmel Church had grown to 40. Still meeting in homes, the congregation moved to Border Street in East Boston, with Rosario's husband Ismael as pastor. Rev. Zabalas formally affiliated the church with the Spanish Eastern District of the Assemblies of God [A/G], then headquartered in the Bronx, NY.

A CONGREGATION IN CRISIS. In 1991 the church faced a crisis. The pastor at the time, an ex-drug addict, was caught cooking cocaine in the church's kitchen. He was disciplined for two years by the Assemblies of God, but decided to resign his affiliation with the A/G council. In the ensuing turmoil, the membership fell to 15 or 20, as some congregants followed the former pastor when he left and opened another church in Chelsea. Others simply withdrew altogether, while the remainder removed to a building at 50 Bennington St., East Boston, which it shared with two other congregations, one Portuguese and the other American, from the Assemblies of God.

In February, 1991, Pastor David Martinez answered a call by the presbytery of Spanish Eastern District to preach to this troubled congregation. In June of the same year,

he was elected as pastor by the congregation, which at that time numbered twenty-one members.

In 1992, realizing that the church needed more room if it was to grow, Pastor Martinez initiated an effort to acquire a somewhat dilapidated church building then available for sale in Malden. The first service at Malden was consummated on December 31, 1993.

GROWING PAINS. As the church continued to grow, pressure on the available space grew even faster. In 2001, the congregation decided to move again. The following year, the church acquired a former Chinese restaurant in Revere. At the same time, the church changed its legal name from the Mount Carmel Church, Assemblies of God, to the Tabernacle Gospel Church.

Appendix 3

Educational Programs

**SPANISH EASTERN DISTRICT – ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
REVERE BRANCH**

CURRÍCULO DEL INSTITUTO BÍBLICO

Primer Año	Segundo Año
El Pent. Y Geografía	Doctrinas Bíblicas I
Evangelicos	Castellano
Origen De la Biblia	Daniel y apocalipsis
Origen. Educasional	Hermeneutica
Libros Poeticos	Historia de la Iglesia I
Libros Historicos	Doctrinas Bíblicas II
Epistolas I	Homiletica
Profetas Mayores	Dispensaciones
Epistolas II	Historias de la Iglesia II
Profetas Menores	Crecimiento Espiritual
Epistolas III	Historias y R. Asambleas D.

Tercer Año	Cuarto Año
Teologia Patoral I	Cristologia I
Pedagogia I	Eticas Cristianas I
Hechos	Usos y Costumbres
Intro. Al Evangelismo	I y II de Corintios
Consejeria Cristiana	Escatologia I
Teologia Pastoral II	Neumatologia
Pedagogia II	Adm. De la Iglesia
Misionologia	Eticas Cristianas II
Sectas	Cristologia II
El tabernaculo y la Iglesia	Escatologia II

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

ESCUELA DE LÍDERES

ÍNDICE PRIMER TRIMESTRE

TEMA

LIDERAZGO Y VISIÓN	1. Principios importantes 2. Evangelismo 3. Tiempo de cosecha
TEOLOGÍA	1. Pecado y salvación 2. Beneficios y responsabilidades 3. La Biblia y la Iglesia 4. Doctrina la Iglesia 5. La Santificación
VIDA CRISTIANA	1. La Oración 2. La Palabra de Dios 3. El culto y la oración 4. Jóvenes 5. Familia Cristiana 6. Anexo familia cristiana (Esposos) 7. Anexo familia cristiana (Esposas) ▪ Un paso más

(cont.)

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

ESCUELA DE LÍDERES

ÍNDICE SEGUNDO TRIMESTRE

	TEMA
LIDERAZGO Y VISIÓN	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El trabajo con grupos pequeños2. Funcionamiento práctico de las células3. Principios de liderazgo cristiano
TEOLOGÍA	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Dios único y verdadero2. El Señor Jesucristo3. Bautismo y la Cena del Señor4. La Promesa del Padre, Espíritu Santo5. La Sanidad divina
VIDA CRISTIANA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Autoridad Espiritual▪ Un paso más

(cont.)

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

ESCUELA DE LÍDERES

ÍNDICE TERCER TRIMESTRE

	TEMA
LIDERAZGO Y VISIÓN	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Planificación, organización y dirección2. Cómo establecer metas3. La personalidad del líder
VIDA CRISTIANA	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El trato con las personas, conducta y necesidades2. Principios de Mayordomía cristiana
TEOLOGÍA	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. El mundo espiritual2. Los acontecimientos postreros3. Sup. Especial Nueva Era4. Sectas pseudo-cristianas <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Un paso más

Appendix 4

Transcript of Pastoral Interviews

1. Fundamentalist Pentecostal Church

Interview with pastor of small, legalistically-oriented congregation in central Connecticut [9/13/06].

In what capacity are you associated with your church? How long have you served this congregation?

24 yrs in current location; 6 years previously in Meriden and Wallingford: total of 30 years

How large is the membership of your church?

About 70 active members.

How would you describe the membership of your church, in social and economic terms? For example, are they mostly first-generation immigrants, or children of immigrants?

Primarily first generation; “somos pobres” (low-income).

What are their primary countries of origin?

90% from Puerto Rico; 2 families from Honduras; 1 from Guatemala.

How would you describe your church?

We are an “iglesia de oración” [a praying church]; we have morning prayer services 5 days a week [Monday – Friday].

Our mission is “dar a entender el evangelio” [giving knowledge of the gospel].

We have no social programs or community outreach. However, a doctor at a nearby hospital occasionally asks us to pray for patients who are at or near death. On three occasions, patients who had been pronounced dead were resuscitated subsequent to our prayerful efforts made on their behalf.

We are not associated with any political organizations, nor is the church open for use by community groups.

(*cont.*)

What kinds of tools or programs do you find most effective for enabling the church to grow?

- grupos celulares [cell groups]
- evangelio personal [preaching “one on one”]
- através de la escuela dominical [by means of adult Bible study on Sundays]
- la radio [radio]
- puerta por puerta — canvassing

Primary means is ‘evangelio personal’ — “cara a cara” [face to face].

La Escuela Dominical is the principal educational tool.

“Cultos hogareños” – church services conducted in homes – are also employed as a means to evangelize.

What are your plans and goals for the future of your church?

“Predicar el evangelio según lo que dice la Gran Comisión.” [Preach the gospel in accordance with the Great Commission.]

\

2. Contemporary Pentecostal Church

Interview with Rev. Luis A. Rivera, pastor of La Iglesia Pentecostal Juan 3:16, A/G, South Norwalk, CT [9/13/06].

In what capacity are you associated with your church? How long have you served this congregation?

12 years as sr. pastor [ordained 15 years ago]: 8 years service previously as associate pastor.

How large is the membership of your church?

Approx. 325 regular active members; typical Sunday attendance is around 500, including visitors.

In terms of tradition, how would you describe your church?

I would characterize us as “moderate.”

How would you characterize the membership of your church, in social and economic terms? For example, are they mostly first-generation immigrants, or children of immigrants?

Mostly working people; the church however is “economically strong.” The church building was originally purchased for \$65K and paid off in four years. It is currently assessed at \$375K.

The church also purchased 4 houses in the immediate area, through personal loans guaranteed by parishioners. It leases the premises to tenants.

The sanctuary has a capacity for 300 people, but fits 200 comfortably.

About ½ are immigrants; there is continual immigration among the membership.

What are their primary countries of origin?

Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala; 22 countries are represented in the congregation.

(*cont.*)

What in your opinion is the most critical need of your parishioners?

“Immigration is a big theme.” Church provides referrals to immigrants in need of social services. Immigration attorneys are brought in periodically to give updates on changes in policy and law.

How are services conducted?

Primarily in Spanish, although translation is provided.

There is 1 English-language service a week, usually on Sunday, conducted by the youth minister.

There are two regular Sunday services: (1) “Escuela Dominical” in the morning begins with a half-hour worship service, after which the congregation breaks up into study groups; (2) Sunday evening worship service.

Children’s church – Sunday a.m.

What kinds of tools or programs do you find most effective for enabling the church to grow?

- a) “grupos celulares” – NO; Discipleship classes are given in homes or at the church to people who want to learn more prior to making a commitment. The discipleship classes cover doctrine and training; there is no graduation as such.
- b) “evangelio personal” – street services held outdoors in local community; also send individuals to non-Christian homes to give presentations when asked.
- c) “através de la escuela dominical” – approx. 300 people enrolled; 235-250 attend weekly.
- d) “la radio/TV”
- e) “puerta por puerta” [canvassing]

Items a), b) and c) above are the primary tools.

What types of educational programs do you offer to your church members?

E.S.L. classes – 40 students are enrolled.

Do the students pay tuition for some or all of the programs?

They pay tuition to attend the Instituto Bíblico.

(cont.)

Is there a biblical or theological basis for including secular education as part of the church's mission?

“We are all sent” to fulfill the Great Commission.

What are your plans for the future?

Acquire land or a new facility to accommodate 1500–2,000 worshippers.

3. Contemporary Evangelical Church

Interview with Rev. Nelson Gonzales, pastor of La Iglesia Evangelica Hispana, Lawrence, MA [6/29/06]

Is your church affiliated with any particular denomination or sponsoring organization?

No, the church is independent and non-affiliated.

In what capacity are you associated with your church? How long have you served this congregation?

Senior pastor; there are two associate pastors, one for visitations, the other for youth.

Interviewee took over as pastor in November of 1990.

How would you characterize the membership of your church, in social and economic terms? For example, are they mostly first-generation immigrants, or children of immigrants?

Mostly 2nd and 3rd-generations of Caribbean descent.

Relatively few 1st-generation immigrants.

What in your opinion is the most critical need of your parishioners?

In the area of education, the young people need to develop strong study habits and a sense of discipline in order to apply themselves effectively. Their parents need to acquire an appreciation of education as vital for the future of their children. The Caribbean culture tends to abandon children.

Does education have a high priority for your members?

It's a work in progress.

(cont.)

What types of educational programs do you offer to your church members?

In the religious area, we have a way to go. In the area of secular education, the church has become a HERC [Higher Education Resource Center], in collaboration with Emmanuel Gospel Center. The Iglesia provides the physical facility and EGC supplies the guidance to run the program. The coordinator on behalf of the Iglesia is David Zagunis.

Are the programs offered mostly of a secular or religious nature?

The principal program is secular.

What are the main objectives of your educational programs?

The objective of HERC is to provide mentoring and encouragement to high school students in order to enable them to enroll in college. HERC assists students in filling out applications for scholarships, and takes them on trips to visit colleges.

In 2005, HERC at Lawrence secured more than \$1 million in scholarship money for students.

The Iglesia is one of 5 HERC sites in eastern Massachusetts. Others are Brockton, Worcester and Dorchester.

Which programs are in greatest demand? In other words, which segment of your membership benefits the most from your educational offerings?

Recent high school graduates, most obviously, but some adults have been motivated to pursue higher education. David Zagunis graduated from GCTS in 1996 and his wife Ann Rodriguez in 1999.

Do you offer these programs to people in the local community outside the church? Are the students all regular members of the congregation?

Yes. The HERC program is open to the entire city. Some students are Buddhists; some participants come from India and other Asian countries. In 2005, the program had 120 students participating, only about 20 of whom were from families connected with the church.

(cont.)

Do the students pay tuition for some or all of the programs?

The HERC program offers advice, guidance and support, rather than instruction.

Which of the educational programs have been the most successful? What programs have been abandoned?

Unquestionably HERC is the most successful. Other educational programs are listed below.

Is there a relationship between the growth of your church membership and the education opportunities that are provided? Or do other factors explain the increase in membership?

There is no question that the emphasis on education has played a significant role in the growth of the church, which now has about 350 regular members.

What inspired or motivated you to develop educational programs at your church?

Social conditions in Lawrence, 10 or 15 years ago, were not good. Young people were hanging out in the neighborhood and getting into trouble. Pastor Gonzales knew that something had to be done, but admits he wasn't quite sure how to go about it at the time.

Did the demand for educational programs come from members of the congregation, or from a different direction?

The trigger was a flyer about the HERC program that arrived in the mail from the EGC.

Is there a biblical or theological basis for including secular education as part of the church's mission?

Not addressed in the interview.

(cont.)

How have the programs changed over the years? That is, what changes have you made along the way? For example, what were the first types of programs you offered, and what are the current options?

In order to obtain government and foundation grant money, the Iglesia established a 501(c)e [non-profit] organization which they call the YDO [Youth Development Organization] to administer HERC. Initially the board members of the YDO were all from the Iglesia, but now they are educators and business executives from the Lawrence area. The YDO applies for grants from Boston area foundations, and was once among multiple recipients of a \$300,000 federal grant from the Dept. of Education.

Other YDO programs for young people focus on middle school students:

- SSAT
- Journalism project — created a student newspaper distributed in their schools
- Genetic project — a forensic lab analysis at Philips Academy involving DNA
- 3-week summer program upcoming at Governor Dummer Academy

Are the programs cumulative in nature; that is, do they follow a sequential path toward progressively higher levels of achievement?

N/A. They tend to be independent of each other.

Are the programs designed to encourage spiritual development, or to enable students to acquire skills that will help them in their jobs?

HERC focuses in a secular direction.

Have these programs contributed to the progress of your church members toward spiritual maturity? What other benefits to your church would you cite?

When Pastor Gonzales and his wife first came to the church, they wanted to attend services. The church at that time had only 24 members, and was in a state of turmoil. The pastor at the time [Felix Carrion] was leaving the Iglesia and an interim ‘pastora’ took over. After 5 months, she left and Pastor Gonzalez was encouraged to apply for the position. The church at the time was affiliated with the UCC. Its orientation was then ‘open’ and ‘worldly’ rather than *legalista* [legalistic].

(cont.)

What strategies or guidelines would you suggest to other pastors who are considering the introduction of educational programs in their churches? Conversely, what mistakes should be avoided? Is there anything you would have done differently?

The benefits to the Iglesia have been fruits of the spirit. Pastors should reach out to the community, seeking opportunities to do God's work. Pastor Gonzales meets weekly with local pastors from other denominations to pray and share ideas. "Hispanic churches should learn to partner with Anglo churches." We have to set aside differences and recognize that 'estamos en el mismo equipo.' Each February, the Iglesia participates in the Congress event in Boston, sponsored by Vision New England, an organization that goes back at least 50 years. Pastor G. advises perseverance, even when solutions can't be seen. When opportunities do emerge, careful planning is essential.

Celebrate educational achievement. The Iglesia has an 'Education Day' to honor students at a Sunday service.

What are your plans for the future?

Continue to progress with HERC. Five years ago, when HERC began, the Iglesia had 3 members with post-high school degrees. That condition is rapidly changing. This year the church has 34 members who are either in college or graduated. For Education Day, 10 more from outside the church were in attendance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABS—CBN Interactive, “U.S. immigrant population jumps,” *Reuters* (Aug. 21, 1996), <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/storypage.aspx?StoryId=47522>.
- Anthony, Michael J., ed., *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).
- Burgess, Harold W., *Models of Religious Education* (Wheaton, IN: Victor Books/SP Publications).
- Claman, Victor N., and David E. Butler, with Jessica A. Boyatt, *Acting Your Faith: Congregations Making a Difference* (Boston: Insights, 1994).
- Conn, Harvie M., and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).
- Cox, Harvey, *The Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966).
- Diaz, Samuel, *Historia de la Iglesia Pentecostal, South Norwalk, Connecticut*, 1994.
- ECS Education Policy Issues Site: Minority/Diversity Issues—Hispanic; Minority/Diversity Issues—African American, <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=84&subIssueID=156>; <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=84&subIssueID=157> (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2006).
- Fowler, James W., “Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives” in *Practical Theology*, edited by Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).
- , “Theology and Theological Education: Some Models and Questions,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 42, No. 1, April 1985. <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1985/v42-1-article4.htm>.
- Gamboa, Suzanne, “Feds estimate 10.5M illegal immigrants,” *Boston Globe* (Aug. 18, 2006), http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2006/08/18/feds_estimate_105m_illegal_immigrants/.
- Gorman, Julie A., “Small Groups in the Local Church,” in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, Michael J. Anthony, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).
- Gornik, Mark R., *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002).
- Green, Clifford J., ed., *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States 1945 -1985* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

- Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *On Job* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).
- Hurlbut, Jesse Lyman, *The Story of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967).
- LeBar, Lois E., *Education That is Christian* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989).
- Levenson, Michael, and Yuxing Zheng, "Immigrant numbers up 15% in state since 2000," *Boston Globe* (Aug. 15, 2006), http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2006/08/16/immigrant_numbers_up15%_in_state_since_2000/.
- Linthicum, Robert C., *City of God, City of Satan: A Biblical Theology of the Urban Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991).
- Lombardi, Joseph, "Jesus Led a Team" (unpublished manuscript, 2004).
- Moore, Rebecca et al., eds., *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).
- Moran, Gabriel, *Religious Educational Development: Images for the Future* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1983).
- Mott, Stephen C., *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
- Mumford, Lewis, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt, 1961).
- Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951 [Rev. ed. 2001]).
- Pazmiño, Robert W. *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997).
- Richards, Lawrence O., *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975).
- Rogers, Donald B., ed., *Urban Church Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989).
- Rossing, John P., "Mestizaje and Marginality: A Hispanic American Theology," *Theology Today*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (October, 1988). <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/oct1988/v45-3-article3.htm>.
- Senge, Peter M., *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1990).

University of Massachusetts Boston, The Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, *Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans and Colombians: A Scan of Needs of Recent Latin American Immigrants to the Boston Area*, Summary of Findings, 2003.

U.S. Department of Commerce, American FactFinder, http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2006).

_____, “U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin,” <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/> Internet Release Date: March 18, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2004).

_____, American FactFinder press release (July 26, 2006), http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/007173.html. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2006).

_____, “Occupation of Employed Foreign-Born Civilian Workers 16 Years and Over from Latin America,” <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab04-8.pdf>. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2004).

_____, “Occupation of Employed Foreign-Born Civilian Workers 16 Years and Over by Citizenship Status,” <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab01-8.pdf>. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2004).

_____, “Total Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers 15 Years and Older with Earnings by Sex and World Region of Birth,” <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab03-10.pdf>. Internet Release Date: February 22, 2005. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2003).

_____, “Total Earnings of Full-Time, Year-Round Workers 15 Years and Older with Earnings by Sex and Citizenship Status,” <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab01-10.pdf>. Internet Release Date: February 22, 2005. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2003).

_____, *1990 Census Profile: Race and Hispanic Origin*, Number 2 – June 1991, pp. 4-5, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1991).

_____, American FactFinder, Census 2000 Summary File (SF 1) 100-Percent Data, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_lang=en, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2006).

Villafañe, Eldin, *El Espíritu Liberador* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996).

_____, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

_____, Bruce W. Jackson, Robert A. Evans, and Alice Frazer Evans, *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995).

Wallis, Jim, *Faith Works: Lessons from the Life of an Activist Preacher* (New York: Random House, 2000).

VITA

The author is David Martinez, born July 22, 1950, in Guayama, Puerto Rico. The fourth of fourteen children, he was raised and graduated from high school in Salinas, P.R. While still in high school, he began his career of service to the community through participation in running a Head Start program for children.

After graduation from high school, he joined a domestic Peace Corps program in Puerto Rico, where for two years he engaged in community service projects, including literacy classes, recreational and educational (anti-drug/crime) activities for youth. He obtained his undergraduate degree from the Interamerican University in San Juan, with a major in accounting and a minor in education.

In 1975, at the age of 25, he moved to the U.S. mainland, establishing himself in Meriden, CT. There he became active in the Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal, where he received Christ as his personal savior. He also met his future wife, Rosa, who belonged to the Iglesia Alpha y Omega [A/G], which he ultimately joined. He then enrolled in the night course sponsored by the Eastern Spanish Bible Institute of the Assembly of God at Bridgeport, and graduated with certification as an A/G minister. Later he taught Bible classes for the Institute in Hartford and South Norwalk, CT, on a voluntary basis.

In 1981 he was asked to serve as pastor for a small Hispanic congregation with 11 members in Bridgeport. Meanwhile, he continued his studies at the Bible Institute, and fully ordained in 1983.

In 1987 he moved with his family to Westfield, MA, where he planted the Iglesia Cristiana La Nueva Jerusalém. During this time he pursued coursework at Westfield State College, and attained post-baccalaureate certification in elementary grades 1-6. Subsequently, in 1995, he graduated from Cambridge (MA) College with a master's degree in education.

In 1989, he accepted a request from the Assemblies of God for Southern New England for a full-time bi-lingual pastor in Brockton, MA. There he initiated two churches (Portuguese and Spanish). After two years, however, he relocated to East Boston to take over a Hispanic congregation with 24 members. In 1993, the Iglesia Monte Carmelo acquired a facility in Malden, and in 2002 removed to Revere, undergoing a change of name to the Tabernáculo Evangelico.

Rev. Martinez received the master's degree in divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston, in 2003. He lives with his family in Everett, MA, and continues to serve as Senior Pastor of the Tabernáculo Evangelico.

This project is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His studies are to be completed in May, 2007.

